A MINISTER OF GRACE

MARGARET WIDDEMER
Author of THE YEAR OF DELIGHT

Laughter, Humorous Situations and Pathos

A Minister of Grace

By MARGARET WIDDEMER

Another of the author's stories of sunshine, sanity and surprises. Surpassing good, deep and broad and vibrantly human.

Andrew Blanton, who was honorary uncle to many nephews and nieces, was a clergyman, and much of the book is enlivened by his bright, cheery ways.

Uncle Andrew is very human, and what seems to be absent-mindedness on his part is generally a sympathetic understanding. Sometimes it is by means wholly indirect that he gets his nephew and nieces out of the tangles and troubles that they succeed in getting into, but he always gets them out and turns what promises to be tragedy into laughter and contentment.

The troubles range from a blackmailing scheme engineered by a discharged sexton, which very nearly upset the very young Rev. Arden Garrison, to an affair with the Ouija board.

It is entertaining from cover to cover.

Other Books by Margaret Widdemer

I'VE MARRIED MARJORIE
THE YEAR OF DELIGHT
YOU'RE ONLY YOUNG ONCE
THE WISHING RING MAN
WHY NOT?

A. L. BURT COMPANY
Publishers - New York

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Nicky Pavese

The Highlands

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A Minister of Grace

By Margaret Widdemer

Author of
"I've Married Marjorie," "Why Not?" "The Wishing-Ring Man," "You're Only Young Once," etc.

A. L. BURT COMPANY

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Of the Clan of God	3
As One Having Authority	45
Wild Woodland	75
A Moment of Revolt	101
"Noblesse Oblige"	135
That Other Eileen	169
Adjustment	197
The Little Queens of Death	221
Powers of Darkness	256

To

DR. AND MRS. CHARLES HOLLAND KIDDER

In Memory of Long Friendship

A MINISTER OF GRACE

OF THE CLAN OF GOD

"I WOULDN'T do it, Marion," said Andrew Blanton meditatively.

"Wouldn't do what?" demanded his sister-in-law. She was the sister of his young wife, long dead even in those days, when Marion's son Arden was a child. But people who had even a shadow of relationship to Dr. Blanton were apt to cling to it.

He eyed her, unafraid; which was an achievement, for stately Mrs. Garrison possessed a combination of quick charm, humor and conviction which made her able to override most people and things. She was not in the least conscious of it, be it said; and, being religious as passionately as she was everything else, overrode for good generally.

"I wouldn't make Arden into a clergyman until he was—let me see—at least fifteen. According to the best medieval authorities, indeed, which believed, as did all the intelligentsia of the Middle Ages, in beginning the business of life at adolescence, sixteen was the usual age—"

She interrupted him with a quick mingling of laughter and petulance, if a woman of her swift dignity could be called petulant.

"Oh, you're laughing at me, with your rounded periods. Of course when you get to the Middle Ages

there's nothing we poor clergywomen can say back. I had an education once, but Ladies' Aid Societies—besides, it's what the child really wants. I think it would have been, even if I hadn't given him to God before he was born. I haven't influenced him. He know's I'd be glad, of course. But he's only twelve. If he turns to any other profession I—we—would let him go willingly. I can't honestly say gladly."

"I wonder," said Andrew Blanton, with his little laugh, looking at her affectionately over his spectacles, "how many things even the best of women can say honestly?"

"I speak my mind," said Mrs. Garrison, "a good deal more than I should in my position, I'm afraid."

"I know—I know!" said Andrew Blanton, with an affectation of humorous apprehension. "To me, sometimes, my dear Marion. But be merciful to-day to an elderly gentleman, and content with, what I am told, was a signal victory over the Senior Warden's wife, who wanted to send her Mary to a French convent for the social affiliations—"

"She had no right to. What Roman Catholic would put her daughter in a Protestant finishing school for the social affiliations, as you call them? But I only reasoned with her till she saw it."

"You don't know how much you can do with people, do you, Marion? I often wonder," he went on, furtively opening a volume by a new writer—it was a Chesterton which he had borrowed of her husband—and peeping in, "why I am so uncowed. I often stay

here for days together. Yet I may say," he ended in triumph, "that except in matters of the flesh, such as coming to meals on time, I have never submitted my conscience to you once!"

"I hope no one ever has! But wasn't I right about the convent?"

"Of course you were. And you hypnotized Mrs. Greening into momentary nobility of character. Much better than none," said Dr. Blanton sincerely. "But as for your small boy, you began with the assumption that God wanted him for one of His ministers before he was born. He's not really had his chance to escape. . . . Surely you have heard the story, my dear Marion, of the young man who was so certain that he had a call to preach—but to whom his Bishop had to explain that it must have been some other noise he heard?"

"If it is God's will, he'll grow up to be a clergyman. If it isn't, he won't. It's the best and noblest profession in the world," said his mother earnestly, smoothing down the black silk which only her regal slenderness kept from overt shabbiness. She was a genuinely high-minded woman, for as her father and grandfather before her had been clergymen, as well as her husband and brother-in-law, she should have known exactly what she was talking about; and from her point of view she did. She would have said, if you asked her, that she counted worldly prosperity a very small thing compared to the privilege of preaching Christ and him crucified. But she knew nothing

of other professions, and, without knowing it, viewed from a little rising ground all the other people in the world, as being made for the benefit and ministrations of her caste. She loved them, of course, and wanted to do all she could for their souls and bodies. She was by far the strongest personality in her household, and Arden grew up, built by her hands as she wished him, strong though he was himself.

He was, at manhood, everything a mother could have wished, though not in the least a prig. There was never the traditional break-away of the clergyman's son; the Garrisons' was too kindly and interesting a household for that. Arden was a son to be proud of from any point of view; tall, handsome, with a gentle, commanding courtesy which won people even before they found that he was as honorable and simple-minded as he was passionately religious. He took his orders, finally, with the enthusiasm and devotion of a young knight of long ago. And being what he was, young (it is then that the clergy are most marketable), handsome, gently born and mannered, with three generations of Episcopal clergy and their connections behind him, he got, as his mother said proudly, a better parish than his father'd ever had, after the first curacy.

His mother had wished, secretly, that he could have been married to Elisabeth Deering before he went to his new kingdom, because it is a proverb of the clergy, "build a church or marry a wife, and go." A parish is a jealous bride, and doesn't like a rival. If

your wife comes when you do, that's another thing. Elisabeth was, every one felt—perhaps too frankly—his heaven appointed mate; the best, the sweetest, the most demurely gay of tactful and hardworking bishop's nieces. She was a little bright thing with strength and determination and kindness enough to face what a clergyman's wife must, undaunted as Mrs. Garrison herself was undaunted. Arden's mother knew her own unbreakable kind when she saw it. And she particularly respected Elisabeth because the girl, unlike most of the women of the clergy, never even said what she thought of things when she was alone with women of other clergy. Few are as brave as that. And she was pink and white and goldy-blond—adorably pretty. It was supposed that the string of theological students' scalps which she possessed would have gone three times in festoons across her looking-glass. It was also supposed that she might marry Arden if he asked her.

He did not ask her. He did not want to marry yet; he was only twenty-six. Of course, far back in his mind was the knowledge that some day, when he was older and had got around to settling down, she would be the best person to settle down with. He was mildly pleased to know that in his new charge she would be intermittently near by, for Dr. Blanton and the bishop were classmates and old friends, and Elisabeth visited him both with and without Bishop Brewer. Indeed, she had adopted him as a sort of brevet uncle. There was a distant connection of

some sort. He would see them all soon, he knew. Clergymen, of course, cannot spend week-ends with friends; but he was pledged to a midweek visit as soon as he could manage it.

The new parish was a charming if fashionable spot at the lower end of Pennsylvania. They gave him a small but excellent car, because the place was principally estates, except for a reach of village inhabited by the poor and needy, the druggist and the post-office. The druggist was good, but the poor and needy were not; they were the dregs too often found in country places where every one has gone away except those without enough character.

The parish also gave Arden a delightful little rectory, exquisitely furnished anew by the women of the parish; indeed, one or two of the vestry made half-humorous apology for its artistic atmosphere, the night they gave Arden his reception in it. You couldn't put your feet up, said the Senior Warden, a benevolent though predatory old millionaire with a stubby white mustache and a fatherly way. His daughter Nancy was too fond of art effects for a man to be able to drop ashes in comfort where her decorating hand had passed.

He chuckled, and his wife, it seemed to Arden, looked a little watchful. He remembered now having been told that Mr. Whitall had been of the people, with a late-married wife who wasn't.

When, a moment later, Arden saw Nancy Whitall, he realized that such a girl had a right, if she wanted

to, to decorate the place with cigar-band plates, or tie up all the furniture with pink ribbons. Something happened to him when he saw her that made him shiver all over and catch his breath dizzily for a moment. She seemed to concern him more intensely than anything he had ever seen.

She was not unusually pretty; nothing like as pretty, indeed, as little Elisabeth. She was tanned deeply, as if by much outdoor life, and her features were a little irregular. There was a smooth, adjusted perfection like her mother's about everything she said and did, combining curiously with a short-phrased, half insolent naturalness which he thought might be the mark of her father in her. She had the certainty and amused friendliness of a girl who, pleasant and kind enough, had never had to remember to please or fear any one in her life. It was not a manner he knew. Even his mother, power that she was, never for a moment forgot the necessity of watching and adjusting herself to the flock.

Nancy Whitall made Arden feel realizingly for the first time that there were other worlds of people, as desirable to inhabit as his own. He had been taught to consider, with a certain pride, that existence consisted of the clergy—and others. This girl made him see a new land, with quite as wonderful people in it. And her first words to him, curiously enough, showed that she too felt their meeting to be an adventure in strange countries for them both.

"You're very like a clergyman," she said, looking

at him with a provocative smile, "but you don't put it on. It's just *in* you."

For the moment he had a little pricking sense of inferiority.

"Naturally. I am one, you know," he said, the more proudly because of the prick.

"I like it. I like your being a new kind of man. And—my nurse used to say an old proverb,

"The black coat and the red
Turn a poor woman's head!"

"Why, look at these ramping crowds who wish I'd go away!"

She indicated the pretty groups of chattering women, obviously waiting for a chance to make a fuss over the new clergyman.

"Good-by for awhile," she said, and obliterated herself in the crowd so swiftly that it was like a vanishing. Other women took her place, as pretty and interesting and charming mannered, but Arden spoke to them mechanically. It took all his equipment of charm and courtesy and friendliness to make him seem to care what any one else said or did for the rest of the evening.

Because of Nancy's importance to him, what she had said rankled. The truth was, he had been a little tired of shop, though he did not know it; and this new world of charming, easy-mannered people, who set him so at ease and made him feel so com-

fortable and happy, was very delightful to him. He began to be glad that he was not too old to become narrowed and professionalized.

And when he spent his promised midweek with Dr. Blanton, summoned when Bishop Brewer was there, it all seemed a little dim and musty. There was the well-known kind of talk; a change in the prayer-book as a matter of national importance; a new hymn of the Bishop's sister which might, with luck, get into the next revision of the Hymnal; a matter of doctrine over which every one at table grew as impassioned as his own flock did over world-politics . . . it was all so old! Even the way little Elisabeth guarded her lips from what his mother called "uncharitable talk," and conscientiously spoke well of every one, (anything else is unsafe as well as unkind, for minister-folk) wore on him. So did the fact that her pretty fair hair was knotted at the wrong angle. (Of course she wouldn't dare make talk by bobbing it.) And her shoes were the wrong kind to go with the pink muslin she wore for a dinner frock. . . .

The truth was, he was restive to get back to Nancy Whitall's country, and everything she stood for was right, and everything that she did not was a little annoying to him. It was such a beautiful land that he had found, and the old one was so old!

The parish adored him with the ardor of a parish's first six months; that cloudless and joyful time which cynical clergywomen know as "the honeymoon." He stayed close to it, and adored it—and Nancy—back.

Occasionally he went over to see Dr. Blanton, and semi-occasionally he ran into Elisabeth. He was, he assured himself, as fond of them both as ever. Elisabeth's schooling, like his own, included a trained cheerfulness and cordiality which did not show her feelings. He found her just the same as ever; even on her flying visits accomplishing a vast amount of parish work with her usual sweet gaiety, and the pretty compliments to all and sundry which were a part of her ways. If, when they talked, her enthusiasm over her Sunday-school scholars at home, and Americanization meetings, was sometimes a little hectic and forced, nobody noticed it, least of all Arden, in love with Nancy and his own parish. Nancy was giving him points on riding, his motor was a new and beloved toy, and the parish moved under his hand like a well-trained, adoring pet animal.

It was in an unimportant chink of his new life, thrilled as it was with the double joy of being in love and being successful, that he had the sexton discharged. That functionary had never fitted his task or his surroundings well. He had been taken on by Arden's mistakenly charitable predecessor because he needed a job, and was too well known in the village to get any. The new rector, desirous of efficiency, found him an unpleasant, soiled young man who never dusted the backs of the pews. The vestry, told about it, agreed with conviction that he was not the man for the place, and replaced him immediately.

When notified of his fall the ex-sexton growled more

disagreeably than ever. He'd git even with that there parson, he said with curses. He departed, embittered to the last degree, to loaf in the bosom of his family.

Now that large body which we still, in America, feel impolite when calling the lowest classes, contains the only true romanticists left us. It is no more than natural. They live close to the primal realities which every thousand on one's income puts farther away; hunger, cold, hate, anger, terror, passion, revenge. They reckon with them, as we do not—they take them seriously. Melodrama, hushed away from us, has taken refuge with these simpler children, who believe in it because they live it. It is in the movies they see, the newspapers they read, the roomers above them. . . . They can no more doubt life to be the sort of thing it was for the Duchess of Malfi than you or I can doubt our pleasant monotonies. Of course, when wronged, you scheme for revenge if you can get away with it. Didn't that girl that roomed with the Hojeks. . . . Oh, it happens.

The curious thing—curious from our viewpoint—is that it *does* happen. But we scarcely believe it, because it is not in our book of the rules, even when it drips over from their lives to ours.

To Bill Parkerman, ex-sexton, it was quite a normal, natural thing to plan for "gittin' even with that there parson." He consulted his aged mother about it, and she agreed with him that it was the self-respecting thing to do. They hoped optimistically

not only for the revenge, but a little money on the side.

The Parkermans had not the best of reputations even in their own set; which was so distant from all other visible sets that neither Garrison nor any of his friends and acquaintances—except the Chief of Police, whom he spoke to cordially when they met—realized it was anywhere. There had been no Parkerman *père*—or *pères,* for Bill, his sixteen-year-old sister Leora, his eighteen-year-old sister V'lencia, and his twenty-year-old married brother Alfred, were all "halves." V'lencia was unmarried and gone, living in a guilty splendor which included a beautiful green plush mission set and a player-piano, deeply envied by all. There was not so much chance of Leora's being offered as beautiful a life, because she had epilepsy or something like it. Alfred was a small, sallow lad who suggested the evils of excessive cigarettes almost to the point of being a Tract. It was, altogether, a wicked and abandoned family of the kind only believed in by pessimists, police officials and people who write eugenic monographs. And they do not really want to. They find they have to.

Arden Garrison, who was gentle, friendly-hearted, and a little too much inclined to think that God didn't intend him to have troubles, was certainly far from thinking the Parkermans to be as far from the normal as they were. They were—no eugenist could have done more than justice to them, their ancestors before them and unquestionably their abundant offspring

after them. But what was a sexton more or less, anyway, with Nancy Whitall in the foreground of a young man's mind? Sextons were unimportant items of business—Nancy was a glowing fairy-tale.

Arden was nevertheless a faithful parish priest, and when old Mrs. Parkerman offered an authentic case of rheumatism and desired prayers, he went like a shot, calling off golf with the second most important parishioner.

She may have really wanted the prayers. Some people of her kind consider them a better curative agent than a horse-chestnut in the pocket, and invariably try the ministrations of the nearest clergyman before calling in the more expensive services of a doctor. She got the prayers, at least. Arden knelt in the little dirty house, beside the unwashed bedclothes, and, with Leora kneeling beside him and Bill at the rocker, prayed earnestly and fervently. He afterward looked the place over with the trained eye of his profession, and decided just what it needed in the way of money and food, and that the parish nurse should be detailed on the case. He hoped that she could coax them to a little cleanliness, especially Leora, who was young enough to have possibilities of betterment. She had a loose-lipped prettiness of big eyes and long lines, and the too-transparent rose and white coloring which looks so admirable to all but doctors. Arden suggested to her very gently that she wash things, including her hands and face, a little. She looked at him submissively from under

her long lashes and promised everything with a soft and fluent sweetness.

"Leory can't work," croaked the old woman on the bed. "It brings on her havin' fits, she says."

Leora flashed a vicious glance at her mother. She hated references to her ailment, which she preferred to call to herself her fainting-spells. But that she couldn't work she quite agreed. They both begged him to come again and pray.

"I feel lots better already," said Mrs. Parkerman quite sincerely.

Arden noted in his little book the particulars of the case, and went away, drawing a quick breath of relief as he stepped out into the sunshine. His little car whirled him toward the Country Club. He might be in time for a round of golf after all, if he hurried —if not with the second most influential parishioner, perhaps with Nancy. He dwelt in his mind on the thought of her, slim and carelessly gay in her little assured, defiant way, with that perfection of grooming as to her hands and her flare of dusky, Florentine-cut hair, which only women with maids attain. Elisabeth's hair came into his mind in contrast, and he tried to think he was remembering it affectionately. It was sunny and pretty, all little wisps and ringlets. She did it herself, of course. Sometimes the pins dropped out and had to be tucked back. He wondered if he couldn't speak to her about doing it differently when he saw her next, by way of improving

her a little. Elisabeth and he were such old friends, surely she wouldn't mind. . . .

And then he forgot Elisabeth, for there, sure enough, on the Country Club porch, stood Nancy. She had on a scarlet hat and sweater; she seemed all of a piece with the Spring sunshine and the blowing wind and the green of the links. She was laughing with another man. Arden's heart gave a spring, half delight at seeing her, half annoyance that there should be any other man in the world who spoke to her. He hurried in, and promptly took measures that this particular man shouldn't, anyway. With his charming touch of gentle authority he detached Nancy with a noiseless quickness which made her look at him with frank admiration.

"I like that!" she told him coolly. "I like people who walk over other people to get what they want. I think it shows that you really value a—a thing. Is that the way being four generations of clergymen makes you act?"

He flushed a little at her mockery, elated nevertheless at what she said.

"I didn't mean to walk over any one," he explained gently. "I didn't think about anything but talking to you. Let's go round once, if you haven't been too often. Will you?"

She nodded, and he hurried off to change. He saw her recaptured by the other man, this time without a pang. It was only till he was ready for her.

He told her, incidentally, about the Parkermans, as much as it was decent for her to know, while they went over the turf together in the sunshiny spring wind.

"Bill promised to 'get' me when I had the vestry discharge him," he told her amusedly. "But I've made friends with him, I think. They seem to bear no malice at all. Indeed, the poor little girl with the epilepsy seemed very grateful for what I could do for the mother. Poor child, it's a pity about her; she's such a pretty, graceful kid."

"Isn't there something I can do? I think it's a *thrilling* case!" was Nancy's reaction to the tale.

But he shook his head. It was like her loveliness to care, but he did not want her in contact with anything of the kind. He would have taken Elisabeth, or his own little sister, to help such people, if need had arisen; they were born to such ministrations. But he wanted Nancy, fresh and lovely and unmarked, to stay as she was. Those gay, piquing insolences, so different from the too thoughtful courtesy of the womenfolk he knew . . . they were a child's ways. They might be changed—something might be changed —by the contact with Leora's atmosphere.

He turned the subject to Nancy herself. He wanted to hear about the things that had made her Nancy. The hunting in England, the wonderful excitements of her winter in New York, the schooling in France —he drew her out about all of it, delighting in the sweep of her gaiety, and even in the young ruthless-

ness that showed through her tales of pleasure and conquest. He talked of himself, too. Each was exploring a new country with delight.

He walked all through his little jewel of a rectory that night late—he had dined out, as he did most evenings—seeing Nancy in its setting; Nancy, excitingly incongruous, miraculously keeping her present graces, and yet the perfect rector's wife. His cheeks burned like a girl's at his dream.

"Dear Lord," he prayed under his breath, "grant Thy blessing on this hope I am daring to hold. Make my road the right one. Guide me, O Lord, but give me, if it please Thee, this happiness."

His prayer slipped quite naturally into the beautiful phraseology of the Book of Common Prayer; but it was none the less sincere and passionate for that.

He was interrupted by a telephone call. It was Bill Parkerman, his rough voice as smooth and polite as the Wolf's in the fairy tale after it had been smoothed down by broken glass: the voice of the days of undusted pew-backs and concealing assurances of devotion.

"Mommer says would you come pray wit' her tomorrer. You helped her a lot to-day, but she feels somepin' fierce to-night."

Arden promised, of course, and not only that, but he called up the parish nurse next morning and told her that he had a particular interest in the case. Was it not the first bit of parish work he had shared with Nancy?

Mrs. Parkerman continued to find that her soul and her rheumatism needed Arden's society. She was very insistent on the prayers, and Arden became quite used to kneeling there twice or three times a week, Leora kneeling devoutly beside him. By the second or third seance more of the family appeared; the opulently unmarried V'lencia, and later Alfred's sixteen-year-old wife, draggled, over-rouged and birdlike, kneeling a bit self-consciously, and eyeing him queerly under her exaggerated sports-hat. He liked her the best of the lot; she seemed such a wistful bit of a thing in spite of her cheapness, and he had one or two scraps of talk with her. She seemed to waver between distrust and another feeling he could not make out—almost sympathy. He tried to get her to come to one of the girls' Bible-classes, but without success. He was not discouraged; that the clan gathered for prayers at all seemed to him a good sign.

It was the eighth time he visited them that they sprang the trap. (It sounds like rank melodrama, when you come to tell it. But melodrama was practically all there was in the limited Parkerman repertoire.) Arden was kneeling, as usual, with Leora beside him sharing his prayerbook, open at the Visitation of the Sick.

"O Lord," he was saying, "look down from heaven, visit and relieve this thy servant—"

His head was bowed and his eyes closed, for naturally he knew the service by heart. He never went

any further with that prayer in that house. Leora gave a moan and dropped against him, both pretty, dirty hands groping for his, and clutching his arm as she fell. He caught her, rose with her in his arms, and looked about for somewhere to put her.

"Here—here's her room," said the little sister-in-law with a choke of excitement in her voice.

She flung open the door into a gaudily untidy little box, and Arden laid the girl gently down on a littered cot in the corner. The dirty, slender hands were strong. She clung as he bent to lower her, and, taking him unawares, pulled his face down and kissed it feverishly. Even then no idea of what it was all about came to Arden; not until he heard Bill Parkerman's raucous voice in the doorway.

"So this is the sort o' thing parsons pull, after firin' a man fer nothin' at all!" was the beginning of what he said; the rest is too evil to put down.

Arden, pulling himself from Leora's grasp, stared at the crew bewildered. They were all crowding in through the door, the whole infamous tribe; Alfred, dingy and furtive even in this great scene of defending a sister's honor; Bill, heavy-shouldered, brutal, uglily triumphant, a bit too much like a stage burglar to be convincing; V'lencia, tawdry and big, and Hazel, the sister-in-law, tawdry and little. Even the old mother had hobbled over, though her rheumatism was one of the few genuine things she owned, and stood peering between the girls' elaborate heads in her dirty

shaker-flannel nightgown. Arden had never known that such scenes existed in real life.

The gist of what they yelled at him was that they would disgrace him for life; unless he might possibly wish to pay them so much that their wounded feelings might be forgotten in the lap of luxury. Or if he insisted he might marry Leora—though they were not sure that they would deign. The old mother was shrillest, with a better vocabulary of vileness than the young people; though Bill made up for lack of variety by forceful repetition. V'lencia, buxom and assured in conscious prosperity, burst in at any chink left by her relatives. The little sister-in-law, newer to the family customs, did little but stare, and affirm violently when appealed to. . . . ("You seen it comin' a long time, ain't you, Hazel? Leory told you, didn't she, V'lency?" on the old mother's part.)

Arden broke from the pack at last, so glad to get out into the air, and have his ears rested from the aching impact of the shrieked and shouted obscenities that he was almost happy in the mere silence and freshness of the drive home.

The first thing, he knew, was to go to his vestry about it, the second was to get in touch with the Bishop. There was a chance that the Parkermans might not mean the worst, but it was too slight to depend on. The vestry, if it was merciful and wise, would not make it public. He knew the Bishop would not. And his mother, stern, infinitely loving prophetess in Israel that she was beneath her gaiety

—his little sister, his kind old stately father, innocently vain of his son; Elisabeth, his clergyman uncles—they would all have to know—they would all be stabbed and stained. From the very thought of Nancy knowing he winced away. Surely if he prayed very hard God would spare him that. Into that gay, childishly daring young heart surely such morbid horrors had never come.

The vestry did as well as could be expected. They were not inclined to publicity unless the worst came to the worst. One or two of them were a little dubious. . . .

"It's a serious charge—a serious charge, Mr. Garrison," said the fat Junior Warden, Farrell, whom Arden had never much liked, because he knew him not to be a straight-living man. But old Whitall, in his brusk, impersonal way, encouraged Arden in a brief sentence or so. He, like the Bishop, his friend, had a personal fondness for Arden. There was something in the boy which called out a feeling of fatherhood in kind old men.

Seeing the Bishop was easier. Dr. Blanton went with him, by his own suggestion. Somehow the trip with Uncle Andrew, with his amused leisureliness and his attitude that excerpts (to be read aloud) from essayists of a bygone day were much more important than the most exciting happening of the present, was quieting.

You could almost believe that the Parkermans and their works were a wild tale from some inferior news-

paper, while Uncle Andrew held forth from Alexander Smith at unhurried length.

"It's not the end of the world, my boy," he said. "From what I can make out your friends the Parkermans are a pest to the community; ought to be in institutions, of course, every one of 'em. The world, I hope, will come to that sort of thing in time. But—you must be prepared for the fact that it's an artless world, and that the worst trouble you'll have, if it comes out, will be in making folks believe in conspiracies off the stage. Even the German war didn't succeed in making some folks believe that there isn't a lot to be said on both sides of everything; it makes them feel so high-minded and charitable to speak well of the devil. But don't worry over it, my son; I've seen worse things than this come out right."

The Bishop was comforting, too, though none knew better than the two old clergyman the tight-rope a clergyman's name, more fragile than a woman's, must walk. There had been times in the Bishop's young days when it took all his own caution, combined with the resources of a clever and resolute wife, to keep the wives of leading parishioners in a safe frame of mind. He and Dr. Blanton recalled a couple of these tales for Arden's comfort.

"But Alice and Jim weathered them all," added Uncle Andrew with a twinkle, "and so will you, boy."

"I didn't need to have your mother write me to know it's an obvious plot," added the Bishop. "But they ought to have had more sense than to think they

could get satisfactory blackmail from a clergyman; all the world knows we never have any money!"

"There's a girl—" Arden blurted out before he thought.

"And she has money?" inferred the Bishop shrewdly. His shrewdness had never extended to connecting Arden with his Elisabeth, whom he was none too anxious to lose. He thought it would be a good thing for Arden to marry a nice girl with money.

"Yes; that's why I haven't said anything definite to her," Arden admitted. "Of course now I can't. The Parkermans may have known I liked her—"

"Of course they have," said the Bishop. "That's the answer. Well, lad, go through it as bravely as you can. Every one's back of you. And it mayn't come to anything, as Andrew says."

That night (they were staying the night) he had a little talk apart with Elisabeth. She caught his hand impulsively, as they walked up and down the verandah. The old men were laughing over some stories of old days in the house. They could see the kindly old heads leaning to one another through the window. They seemed very old and callous suddenly, and he was transiently drawn to Elisabeth; after all she was young too.

"I've heard about it all," she said, her voice shaken out of a little of its calm sweetness. "It's *horrible.* Uncle Andrew told me all about it while you were upstairs. Oh, Arden, isn't there anything I can do to help? He said he thought I could."

Just one of those foolish things Uncle Andrew mooned into doing. But after all she had had to know.

"No," he said, "of course not. Only believe in me," he added, snatching at her affection, unconsciously, as a shield to his self-respect. And he judged Nancy by her, a little, too.

"Oh, that!" said Elisabeth, laughing as if the thing were ridiculous. "You know I believe in you . . . in every way."

"But supposing they could seem to prove I did it?" he asked, unheeding the catch of passion in her voice in his absorption in himself and Nancy. He put her in Nancy's place. Nancy might hear. Better men than he had been proved guilty when they were innocent.

Elisabeth's little pink and white face sobered.

"If you really did it, of course you would be a very wicked man. I don't think I could ever want to see you again. . . . But nothing any one could say would make me believe you were. I know better—that's all. . . ." But Nancy was so unlessoned in life. Elisabeth, from her position, knew more of human nature, of wickedness and injustice and evil, than Nancy had ever needed to know. Sometimes too great innocence is so shocked by its first facing of evil as to believe it helplessly. . . . He lost himself so deep in thought of what Nancy might think as to scarcely hear Elisabeth, asking him questions in her swift, sweet childish voice that was so efficient. She questioned him closely

about the Parkermans, Valencia, Hazel, Alfred, the old mother, as if she were trying to think out something. Was she trying to sift the evidence already?

"Valencia," she said musingly; "she sounds pretty hardened. The mother, I suppose, would be beyond doing anything with. . . . The little sister-in-law who dropped you into the trap—just one of those poor little street-sparrows—only sixteen . . . and I suppose the Alfred brother dopes, which is, of course, hopeless."

He interrupted her in a burst of impatience.

"You mean all right, Beth, but for goodness' sake don't talk about it any more!"

She was commenting and weighing so coolly! And he was feverish to get away, to see Nancy. . . . Then he came back remorsefully to little Elisabeth, smiling at him still with her trained sweetness which no wound could outwardly ruffle, but with eyes which had winced at his words.

"Very well," she was acquiescing brightly; "and remember that we're all praying for you as hard as ever we can. Our Lord will see it through the right way. . . . But one thing I would do, Arden, if you don't mind my saying it; I'd go back with Uncle Andrew for a day or two, if you can leave your parish that much longer. He wants you, I know, and it will give you a perspective."

He thanked her, and suggested going in. He did not know how much that steady brightness cost her. . . . He was tired of hearing about the Lord. He'd

heard about him all his life—and here he was! He'd been made over to the Lord before he had any say about it, trained like a sheep to walk into a pen. And now . . . and now. . . .

But in the end he did go back with Dr. Blanton. He could get a respite from his bitter thoughts, back in the little sleepy rectory where the worst problem, so far as one could tell, was the darky housekeeper's struggle to dust the books without touching them, which was Dr. Blanton's only demand.

He found himself pouring out his feelings to Dr. Blanton, in spite of himself, before he had been there a day, as the two sat in the shabby book-lined study.

"I hate it all," he said angrily. "Mother always telling me that we were set apart to guide the souls of men . . . that nothing could be more wonderful or better worth suffering for. But women don't know. . . . My Lord, Uncle Andrew, I don't feel as if I'd been set apart—I feel as if I'd been chained; locked in a prison like Caspar Hauser, too young to know any better. The other men Nancy Whitall knows can be men; they don't have to purr and ask vestries to sit in judgment on them, and beg mercy from bishops through their mothers. To have to feel like a yellow dog for the Gospel of Christ—"

Uncle Andrew pulled the little pointed gray beard that somehow managed to look clerical, and considered Arden with a quizzical gentleness.

"No, my boy, you didn't have a chance," he agreed with a staggering frankness. "Most of your fore-

bears and connections were clergymen. Your mother was of clergy stock. The air all round you was full of the suggestion that you be a clergyman when you grew up. But my own feeling about you has been that you were not so much the yellow dog you describe as the *bon chien qui chasse de rāce.* . . . But of course one doesn't know. Why, this may be a blessing in disguise, boy! With the influential friends in your parish you may be able to get out of the ministry and into something where you can have the normal man's ideals and the normal man's riches, and not bother about guiding the souls of men any longer. . . . Only I wouldn't stop saying my prayers for awhile yet."

He looked at the old clergyman in surprise. This was the last counsel he would have expected from Uncle Andrew, for all his little mannerisms a priest to the bone.

"You really think," he began.

"Really, once in a long while, as a change from allowing my betters in the daily prints and monthly magazines to think for me," said Uncle Andrew amiably. "At present my thought-capacity, such as it is, is exercised by the idea that perhaps you don't belong to your caste except by training. If your ideals are those of Miss Nancy—that is Mr. Whitall's daughter, I think—if you really belong to that class and caste, that is where you should actually be, and not allow a mistaken mother's pressure to continue to mold your life fifteen years afterward."

Arden's eyes lighted. He had never seriously allowed himself to think of that way of escape. The consecration of the priest—which laymen rarely remember at all—is a thing the priest takes so seriously as a rule that he never thinks of it any more than of his hands; and considers detaching himself from it about as much. . . . And he'd thought that Uncle Andrew, like the rest, considered him more or less destined to little Elisabeth. . . . He must be wise after all, to realize how things were.

"But I'd say my prayers just the same, boy," Uncle Andrew suggested again when he came down, his finger in the inevitable book, to say good-by.

Arden smiled back at him. Things felt better.

But back on the ground, the affair loomed inevitably black and close again. . . . Even the terror of feeling that these dear and charming people of his might be making conversational capital out of his tale in a couple of weeks was unbearable. He shivered in his soul at the thought of these pretty mockeries, which he had enjoyed so as a relief from the careful charitableness of his own kind; the off-hand flippancies of the men whom he had drawn into his church work, and unconsciously become a little like. . . . But Nancy would not mock, even if she knew—surely not Nancy. The rude strain in her father was a piquant daringness in her; the easy forthrightness of her mother, veiling, he had learned, as deep a caste-spirit as his mother's own—surely it veiled, too, as high feelings and nobilities!

"Oh, God," he prayed wildly, walking up and down his study, "Make Nancy loyal to me at any cost! Make her stanch to me, whether it is thy will or not!"

It was the first prayer he had ever allowed himself to make, unguarded by the "Thy Will Be Done" which his childhood training had insisted on as a necessary thing. Such unguarded prayers, the spiritually wise tell you, have more chance of being answered. But for all that it is a mistake, they say, to make them.

He went to see Nancy that night. He could keep away from her no longer. She was unchanged to him, just what she had been, which made him think that her father had not told her. He was on fire to tell her what was in his heart, that night, and it almost seemed to him as if she was trying to win the actual words from him, by word and movement, and manner, that surely she could not realize were too reckless. Once or twice during the evening he felt this overrecklessness as jarring dimly; but he pushed it from him. His ideals, he told himself truly, were those of a certain small class, to whom touches and words meant too much, guarded as they had to be. He went home racked by the almost physical effort he had had to make the evening through to keep from taking Nancy in his arms and telling her how he loved her; throbbing, too, with the excitement of the most wonderful evening he had ever had with her. She'd never had to weigh word or deed for the sake of watching congregations. dear, unburdened young

Nancy! He hoped she would never learn to, even after they were married.

He dreamed on, all the way home. He had walked, the longer to be out under the sky with his thoughts. . . . Perhaps soon he could tell her. Things were beginning to look safe again.

It is at such moments as these that blows, proverbially, fall.

"Parkerman is here, Mr. Garrison," his housekeeper told him pleasantly as he entered. "He won't go away. I told him the new man was perfectly satisfactory, and I didn't think there was any use his staying, but he would do it."

Parkerman sat in the little room Arden's dreams had always consecrated to Nancy; a hateful sight there. He began his business without preface. He had waited long enough, he explained. He'd shut up because that old Blanton—nice old cuss—had been an' talked to him about Mr. Whitall not likin' it. But after all Whitall couldn't do much to a free American citizen, if he did have a lot of ill-gotten money. Leora was sick from the tragedy still—she'd developed faintin'-fits from the shock. (The impudence of this passed over Arden's head; he was too horror-struck.) In fact, it seemed that the whole Parkerman family was fading like a flower under this unprecedented soilure of their scutcheon. It had the goods on the parson, and unless highly paid would take great pleasure in getting back at him. Or reinstatement, along with back salary as sexton, might be considered. . . .

He went into hideous details of what would get into the papers.

"No matter how much pull you got you can't make 'em keep you after that, vestry *nor* church. You got as much chanst to make a livin' as a celluloid pup in hell. An'—" Bill looked thoughtful— "I dunno but I'm goin' to tell the world anyhow. Any man that would take advantage of prayin' to win the affections of a trustin' young thing like Leory—"

Arden could stand no more turns of his rack.

"Go as far as you like—tell every one!" he cried, springing to his feet and standing, tall, handsome, steel-white, over the other man. "I have God on my side."

"An' all the pretty girls," Bill finished. "They're more use. If you had that Nan Whitall enough vamped to swing old Farrell for you—they say his wife wants to kill her—him an' Whitall might fix it up for you. But I guess you ain't." He leered as he spoke of Nancy. "I guess I better fix things so you can't wreck any more homes. You're too much of a lady-killer for this here town."

Before he got any further Arden, furious, put him out of the house by main strength. It was not hard; all the Parkermans were physically frail. He came back, excited almost to happiness by the physical outlet. But in a few minutes the thing came to him in its reality. For the hope of a distant future in another profession from this that had been made so hateful to him was a frail thing, against the actuality of this impending disgrace. The thing would be

public now. And his last chance of keeping it from Nancy would be gone.

Next day Elisabeth called him on the telephone—Elisabeth, of all people, here in his own parish. Visiting some friends, she said. She wanted him to come over to see her.

He almost swore in his annoyance. He did not want to see Elisabeth, who had always looked up to him. His feeling for her included, naturally, a certain male lordliness, as is inevitable when a woman has been suggested to a man as a matrimonial possibility. But he had a very real fondness for her, and a long training in doing what he ought whether he liked or not. There was no excuse he could think of. So he went.

After the first, it proved a comfort to talk the thing out with her, she was so matter-of-fact about it. She was sweet and comforting, even a little gay over the seriousness with which he took it all. It was not in the papers as yet; but there had been a flock of cunningly written letters, which Parkerman must have had ready before he went to make his last attempt at Arden, settling down all over the parish. The people Elisabeth was staying with bade him good-night with marked cordiality . . . which he did not want to be grateful for. But he had needed the relief Elisabeth's counsel gave him, he realized after leaving. Only he wished he had not given her the Parkerman address. He hoped she had no wild plan of trying to soften the hardened old wretch of a mother into confession:

it was only in stories that people did that sort of romantic thing, as Elisabeth should know after a lifetime of parish work. But you couldn't stop Elisabeth after her mind was made up, and after all she had a charm about her; even the Parkermans mightn't insult little Elisabeth.

. . . It was worse than he had thought it would be; the pitying looks of his people, assurances of belief which hurt because they were condescendingly put; letters from people whom he learned now for the first time had always hated him; other letters from gushing fools of both sexes; even the ones from kindly souls —the whole thing made a scar for life. He went through it with courage, but it was a horrible week. The vestry sat again, formally in judgment on him this time. There was a parish meeting, reported to him by a half dozen of the too-zealous, where there was a long, long wrangle before he was granted that futile thing, a vote of confidence. It was being kept out of the papers by a miracle that could not be of long continuance. There was the prospect of an ecclesiastical trial.

Whitall was stanch through it all; but his attitude hurt Arden more than he told himself it should. He too plainly seemed less to defend Arden's innocence than to admit, unofficially, that even if Arden *had* been guilty it wasn't such an important thing to a man so efficient in his profession. This was not his public attitude, of course, nor even frankly his private one; but Arden, sensitized into clairvoyance by his unhappi-

ness, felt it none the less. No Sir Galahad was ever prouder of his stainless shield than Arden, consecrated priest, and son and grandson of priests, had been trained to be. He did not realize that this was a thing men outside his caste could not realize or know.

The end of that racking week was a summons to Whitall's house. Arden had thought he was steeled for anything, but this was a last, needless humiliation. He had carefully avoided Nancy since he knew that she must know. He was nearly sure to see her, now. . . . Yet his heart leaped a little in spite of him at the hope. He had prayed that she be loyal to him at whatever cost, and he believed that God would answer that prayer. And yet . . . if she were not. . . .

Well, if she were not, he told himself, so much the better for her. For her father's last telephoned words had taken nearly all hope from him.

"Some new business has turned up," Whitall had said. "Come over right away."

The telephone rang desperately again, just as he left, but he did not answer it. He hurried out and drove over to Whitall's in the little car he had loved so boyishly, staring straight ahead with eyes which scarcely saw the direction they drove in. He wondered, dully amused, whether it would be considered that a discredited clergyman had a right to keep a car given him by people who believed in him. He would not longer have his little rectory, of course. He would not even have honor, except in his own

soul. . . . not anything . . . unless reckless, innocent Nancy, believing still, walked out into the darkness with him to a new life.

He passed into the big country-house like a man going to execution. Entering Whitall's study, half blind, he was surprised to find the old man rushing at him with a triumphant air, shaking both his hands warmly. At Arden's astonished air he fell back, astonished, too.

"Didn't Miss Deering get you on the telephone? She said she thought you ought to be told more before you came—"

Elisabeth, of all people— What had she to do with it? And at that she came into the room herself, just the little dauntless pretty thing of every day.

"I couldn't get him," she said. "He'd just gone. Miss Whitall's trying. . . . Oh, Arden, it's all right! It's all right!"

"It's all right!" Whitall boomed joyously. "You needn't resign, my lad—unless you want to do it because you have something better in view than being a parson; as well you might, after this! You've gone through this in a way that makes me darn proud—"

Elisabeth interrupted again—Elisabeth, ordinarily too well mannered to interrupt millionaires or scrub-women. She was clasping her hands joyously, almost dancing with delight.

"It's all right; Hazel confessed!"

He was too dazed yet to get it.

"Hazel—what Hazel?"

"Hazel is Alfred Parkerman's wife," Whitall explained with what, for him was gentleness. "This wonderful kid has been working all week to get it out of her. And she's succeeded, by Jove—actually a signed confession! It's more than I thought anybody could put over," he ended, with a look of man-to-man admiration of the girl.

Elisabeth dimpled with exactly the same pretty smile as if she were being praised for an efficient Sunday-school class.

"I never thought I'd manage it," she confessed. "And I couldn't help being sorry, too, for the poor little girl. But I think she was happier after she'd told. She seemed fond of Arden. . . . I—I—none of Arden's good friends but would have done as much if they could. It was really Uncle Andrew's idea, not mine; he talked it over with me, and told me he thought there might be a chance if I asked Mary Lee if I could come stay with her, and tried hard. It is you who have been wonderful through everything, dear Mr. Whitall. Uncle Jim always speaks so wonderfully of you." She had her old armor of sweet composure on by now; the courteous, trained brightness that must never forget to please. But for a minute a real, passionate little determined Elisabeth had peeped through, and Arden looked at her fascinatedly. He hadn't known there was this sort of thing to her.

"Well, I won't speak wonderfully of you," Whitall was replying bluntly, "though I've always thought old

Dr. Blanton had more brains than he needed for the ministry, now you speak of it. But I tell you again, Miss Deering, if you take that job I have in mind for you, in time you'll be making big money. Young people like you and Garrison shouldn't be fooling away your time and energy on parish work: a boy like Arden oughtn't to be at the mercy of a pack of degenerates every time they choose to write letters about themselves and their fits. I've had an idea in my head about your future for some time, Garrison—"

As Uncle Andrew had suggested. And an opening from old Whitall's hand meant a starting point from which either he or Elisabeth could go far. . . . And Nancy—Nancy within his reach again? He too—for Whitall was a man of his word, even when that word was only a hint—would be in that business world, where every ounce of expended energy counted for your own advancement, not for a vague good of indifferent others; where a man like himself, he knew, could go far. Nancy, and being one of Nancy's kind!

"Does—Miss Whitall know?"

"About the Parkerman girl owning up? Why, we only just knew ourselves!" said Whitall in high good humor. "But she's strong for your side, my boy—has more views than anybody else except my little secretary-to-be, here!"

He excused himself, on the frank plea of wanting to tell her, and hurried downstairs to the little room where he knew Nancy would be. As he left them, he saw Elisabeth, having been settled in a chair for

further coercion on the subject of the secretaryship, settling her pink skirt daintily so that it was decorous, and explaining again why she couldn't do it. Her small pink and white and golden figure was the last thing Arden saw, against the dark carved background of the high chair. And queerly enough, it was just such a chair that Nancy lounged in when he reached her.

He always remembered her most vividly as he saw her then, though he saw her for a good deal of his life afterwards. She was more than ever a woodland creature of reds and browns, for her cheeks burned crimson under her brown skin, and the dull-green of her scant little dress made her eyes and hair seem duskier than ever. As she rose to meet him, almost with a spring, one long gold earring swung hard against her vivid face. He had never seen her when she seemed so alive and forceful.

"I've come to tell you about this trouble I've been through," he said eagerly as he entered, without other preface. "I can talk to you now. It was too horrible, too soiling, for you to be told about before—I suppose you've heard scraps of it, but I hope not much—not you."

"It wasn't too horrible!" she said energetically. "Do you think I don't know all about much worse things than that? Everybody does them and talks about them." She came close to him, taking hold of his arms in what was almost an embrace, so that he could feel the fever of her hands through his black

coat-sleeves. "Supposing you did do it? I don't care! Those things don't count where a man's concerned. Fight it through! I'll stand by you, and tell any lie you like. I'll line up Father, too. And I can swing old Barton Farrell into line, too. He's crazy over me."

His arms quivered under the burning touch of her hands. But he stared at her as she stood before him, vibrant with her passion of romantic defense. Where had he heard words like those before, about old Farrell? . . . Yes—Bill Parkerman had spoken them, with an evil look. He withdrew from her instinctively, automatically.

She was frightened at his look.

"What—what is it?" she stammered.

"You believed I could do a thing like that? You could forgive a man who had been such a creature? You would—lie for such a man, use your power over a roué for him, you whom I scarcely thought I could tell about such men and women?"

She stared at him, hurt and uncomprehending, and he softened, as the human side of it came back to him with a stab.

"Oh, Nancy, I didn't know we were so different—I didn't understand," he murmured. "I'm sorry I spoke to you so harshly. But—you don't understand, either. You're offering me the best thing you know. Maybe you're too big for me to comprehend—too noble. But we won't ever be able to see this the same way—"

"What do you mean?" she demanded, looking at him levelly; and he saw that it was across a gulf of beliefs and environments that neither of them could ever pass.

He had stepped unconsciously back into the fastness of his ministerial courtesy—the manner of his caste.

"Thank you for what you have said to me. But it won't be necessary. Elisabeth Deering came here to-night to tell your father that she had induced one of the Parkermans to confess that the whole thing was a lie. . . . I—you see, I didn't do it, Nancy. It is really true that I did nothing wrong. I can see that, knowing only the things you do, it's natural you should have thought me guilty—" his voice broke. He had loved that Nancy who existed nowhere now, and it hurt dully to go on talking to this girl who was not she. "But I didn't know your point of view. And you didn't know mine."

He went out before she could answer. He could not bear to stay in the room any longer. He could hear Elisabeth's voice as he paused before Whitall's door.

"I don't believe I could," she was saying. "You see, we're a sort of clan all by ourselves, we clergy-people. Even if I did make good I wouldn't feel as if I belonged. And I do belong where I am."

Arden opened the door and spoke more abruptly than he knew.

"Elisabeth," he said, "may I drive you back? I

want to give you some messages for Uncle Andrew."

He made his acknowledgments to Mr. Whitall mechanically, and hurried Elisabeth away. He scarcely spoke all the way home: but before he dropped Elisabeth at the Lees' he held her hand close for a long minute.

"Tell Uncle Andrew, please," he said, "that . . . I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

Uncle Andrew, when he had the message, looked up dreamily from his task, which was at that moment the composition of a letter to a Western bishop whose pet curate, having ramped down into Dr. Blanton's parish with curious ideas about ritual dances, was being painlessly deported to a more advanced curacy in an Eastern city.

"They'll like ritual dances in that part of the country. Who am I to stop any curate from keeping the old maids of his congregation healthfully employed? —though I do think it must be confined to the parish-house," he added. "We're not really ready for them down here. What did you say, Lizzie child?"

She said it again, flushing a little.

"*Bon chien,*" said Uncle Andrew with the excellent accent he had acquired in Paris thirty years before, "*chasse de race.* I hope," he added compunctiously, "that I didn't influence him unduly." Elisabeth opened her eyes wide.

"Why, he said—"

"But it wasn't so entirely his mother—really, it was not so much his mother as his ancestors. I'm afraid

he was beyond being anything but a servant of God before he was born. . . . And the Gospel of Christ," said Uncle Andrew over the flap of his envelope, "is after all not such a bad thing not to be ashamed of!"

AS ONE HAVING AUTHORITY

"Having nephews and nieces," said Dr. Blanton with transparent mournfulness, "is a profession, not a taste."

Elisabeth Garrison, who was only his niece-in-law by marriage, looked at him wonderingly. Her husband laughed.

"You mean that it doesn't give you much time from your parish, Uncle Andrew?" he said. "Well, we have to go back to ours to-morrow morning, so there will be that much off your mind."

"I may take the same train," said Uncle Andrew astonishingly, for he was not fond of travel, "going to New York."

"That will be lovely," murmured Elisabeth, who never asked questions for fear she might stumble on an embarrassing one. Arden had not the same restraints.

"What on earth for?"

"Well, I'm getting to be an old man. And the parish is hurling me forth on a vacation—with emoluments. If you lived nearer, Arden, I would ask you to keep an eye on my locum tenens; the last one wore such exciting vestments that it was a weary while before my own tamer garments, I fear, really delighted the eye of the younger element again. . . . And I

have my sister Ella's son on my mind. My namesake. Andrew's letters seem depressed of late. I have thought"— Uncle Andrew looked like an elderly and gamesome owl for a moment in his effort to express a hint—"that there may be a girl. I am very good at arranging young men's affairs with girls. . . ."

"Andrew shouldn't worry. I hear that that settlement-church of his, or whatever he calls it, is prospering beyond everything," said Arden Garrison, whose own fashionable little Pennsylvania parish sometimes left him longing for more work to do.

"Well, well; I just think I'll drop in," said Dr. Blanton. "My horse Horatio's a little on my mind, but perhaps it will do him good to miss me."

. . . . . .

As Fiammetta talked, sometimes haltingly, sometimes with a sudden jet of passionate words that tumbled over themselves, Andrew Anthony's eyes turned at intervals to the picture of old Bishop West, over his fireplace. Anthony had not put it there. It was a part of St. John's Memorial that would be there long after his pastorate was done, and after, thank Heaven, the problem of Fiammetta Angelo had ended itself—somehow. And any end would be better than suffering over it as he was, and as Fiammetta was; though Fiammetta, poor soul, had at least the relief of talking about it unceasingly to every one she knew who would stop to listen. Anthony gripped the edges of the table behind him with one nervous

hand. . . . Fiammetta was hurting him horribly. He scarcely paid attention to what she was saying—he had heard it all before.

"An' when I dress up for please John, he say: 'You stupid, you silly! You not like American girl! No so nobby.' When I used to put flowers back my ears in Italia he say: 'Ah-h, molta bella.' Now if I go buy American hats he not like it. An' not like me be Italiana neither—"

"But, Fiammetta, what can I do?" Anthony demanded. "I wish John hadn't grown away from you. I will do all I can to help you learn American ways and ideas, and perhaps you can win him back."

"Win him back!" she said passionately, pushing one hand through her hair with a tragic gesture. "But this day he say—ah, he say new things you not have heard. He say 'American divorce.' He say, all wrong to stay marry when all love is gone. He say we no more belong together. He belong with beautiful American. They all alike—I only an Italian that can't be educated, can't be young no more—"

"Fiammetta! Did John Angelo really tell you he wanted to be free from you and marry another woman?"

"Yes. He only say what I know long time. I wish I could kill her."

Anthony's eyes still brooded on old Bishop West, erect and briskly authoritative in his broad gold frame.

"You mus' stop heem! You are all the pries' what he think anything of. He is ateisto, you know that.

He believe in you, because your religion is all take baths, read books, be 'Mericano. You make him stop."

After she had long gone, sobbing stormily and without concealment into her coat sleeve, Andrew Anthony sat in the chair she had sprung from, watching the assured old portrait with troubled young eyes.

"I suppose you'd have known how to put this through with colors flying—and made some sort of unholy mess of it from everything but the church angle. . . . And at that you'd be doing more than I can," he said, addressing the portrait. "Good Lord, I wish the days would come back when a man *knew* he was God's mouthpiece because he'd been ordained!"

Anthony was the rector of St. John's Memorial Church, and for a man of thirty-two he held an enviable position. It was one of those churches which are pointed to proudly as "keeping up with the needs of the time." It had all manner of classes; it had a gymnasium; it had a room which was at times an excellent neighborhood theater, and gave one-act plays entirely acted by the people of the neighborhood. It also had in Anthony a rector who, in spite of three generations of Episcopal clergy behind him, did not nag his flock about religion. They were mostly atheistic Italians. They appreciated his attitude. They agreed politely that perhaps there was something in what he said, and, meanwhile, they felt free to use the swimming pool and come to English classes. They liked him. Most people did.

He and John Angelo had liked each other thoroughly, and, in spite of everything, he was drawn to Angelo still. The Angelos had come from Italy ten years before; he a slim, dreaming boy with a beautiful dark face and a passion for drawing after his work was over; she a graceful little wisp of a contadina with the dark prettiness of her sixteen years, and eyes that even for an Italian girl were exceptionally beautiful. At twenty-six, like most of her class, she had lost the woodland grace and the look of youth; only her eyes were lovely still, under the badly chosen American hats. He, at twenty-eight, was fairly on the way to being a big artist. And he still had his dark young beauty. He was a very wonderful product of the Memorial's helping activities. It hadn't spoiled him, unless having outgrown Fiammetta was being spoiled.

Anthony tried to put himself in Angelo's place. Suppose you were married to a woman who bored you, who hadn't a thing in common with you, who went about weeping shrilly because you loved her no longer, who made irritating little forlorn attempts at winning you back by the wrong kind of cheap clothes. It could happen, he supposed.

Angelo, besides being a fine painter, had a mind. Fiammetta was not clever, not even understanding. Angelo loved beauty and luxury and civilized standards of living. Fiammetta was not teachable. He mustn't judge. He had no right to judge. . . . He must be fairer to John Angelo than he would to any other man, because there was Phœbe Rockingham.

Phœbe was a little darting, vivid hummingbird of a girl. She came down and taught swimming classes, and sometimes took dancing classes when some other volunteer dropped out. She believed in everything and every one so ardently that you hadn't the heart to stop her. And she was sweet—oh, she was the sweetest and loveliest and kindest; she talked about freedom and breaking old narrow laws and giving every one the right to broadness and happiness in a way that made it very clear how far she was from knowing that any one could ever misuse any gift. She was too good to believe in the possibility of other people being less pure and ardent and generous than herself. Anthony loved her quite as much as John Angelo did. That was why, when poor Fiammetta had uttered her quite natural wish to kill the woman her husband loved, Anthony had felt his sympathy, in spite of him, going. . . .

Perhaps Angelo would make Phœbe happier than he could. They always seemed to have so much to say to each other, so much in common. Anthony felt himself to be a slow-minded, unexciting person beside these two. Oh, what was right—what was wrong? What should he do, and even if he knew, should he do it?

But, blessedly for him, it was time to go home to dinner. Afterward he must take his troop of Boy Scouts out for a hike. That group of chattering, black-eyed restless young imps would effectually keep him from giving thought to anything but them.

As he went slowly down the broad stairs Phœbe flashed up them, singing.

"Hasn't this been a most gorgeous day? I do hope you've liked it as much as I have," she said. "I've been out getting autumn leaves over on the Palisades, with at least thirteen children who never saw a leaf before. It was *such* fun! They want to make it a mixed affair next week—Boy Scouts and you. Want to come?"

"Do I want to come?" said young Anthony, perhaps a bit more ardently than the occasion demanded—but Phœbe was so ardent herself over the smallest thing that it didn't matter. "I want to do it more than anything I know."

She clapped her hands. "It'll be even better than last time, though we said it couldn't be! Don't forget! I've just time for one flying leap from here to the pool."

She was gone, her swift little feet tap-tapping above him, up another flight. He could hear her voice, just as gaily friendly, just as sweet, greeting some shrill-voiced small child on the stair above, and his unreasonable heart sank. He knew well the outrush of warmth and friendliness to all the world which comes of caring for some one person in it. It had seemed to him that Phœbe was gayer and happier with every one lately.

Fortunately there were always things to think about. This Angelo problem was not the only one in his big flock. Anthony concentrated doggedly on other mat-

ters till he was through with his meal; after that the Boy Scouts, as he had foreseen, quite occupied his mind. And then he met Father Doughty.

Anthony was on good terms with the Roman Catholic priest of his neighborhood. To-night Father Doughty greeted him with warmth. "I hear you're to have a visitor who's a friend of mine," he said jovially. "Why did ye never tell me that Andrew Blanton was your uncle?"

"I—why, how could I know you knew him?" said Andrew, naturally. "Do you mean that Uncle Andrew is coming up to see me?"

"Sure, I must have spoiled his grand surprise," said Father Doughty. "Know him? Sure, you know a man pretty well when you and he and three doctors are doing fifteen men's work in a yellow-fever epidemic. I'm not saying he has the right orders, but if he was a saint when he was thirty it's little likely he's different now. And that he was—and as hard a worker for the souls of the poor as ever any of you young lads with your gymnastics and clinics."

Anthony smiled. Narrow old Uncle Andrew might be, and pedantic to a wearying degree when you were in a hurry, but he *was* a good man. It would be rather a comfort to hear one of old Uncle Andrew's long, quotation-larded stories, with their aroma of dead languages, and their associations with petted small boyhood, again—here in this place where one had to be so continuously old and wise. . . . Not that Uncle Andrew was a person to look up to, except for his

kindness and sweetness. As Andrew saw him, he was the possessor of an enormous amount of unrelated facts in a dozen languages, and of a quaint pride in pouring them out on any devoted head which might be near and hold itself sufficiently still. He had an elderly buggy in which he made pastoral calls, and a more than elderly rectory in a small town in Delaware, which was covered with books everywhere, except the ceiling. Uncle Andrew's whole life was a peaceful and amiable cross-section of the Eighties; it seemed to Andrew Anthony that Uncle Andrew and everything he stood for were very far removed from life as it actually was. He turned back to his rooms.

Uncle Andrew was there, sure enough, sitting at ease in the big leather-covered chair, one unpressed trouser leg crossed over the other knee, with his skull-cap and his glasses and his peering, kindly old face and his spotless, well-bred shabby clerical look. He was reading the "Outline of History," chuckling a little as he read—doubtless over Mr. Wells' views on Napoleon, toward whom Uncle Andrew was quite amiable. He jumped up nimbly when his nephew came in.

"You didn't expect a visitation, did you?" he demanded gaily, in his old-man voice. "But my parish, being, as I supposed, slightly wearied of my well-meant inquisitions—ha—ha! That's what Dr. Duryea said; he said: 'Andrew, we've tired of you and your old anecdotes! The parish has made up a purse; now get out of this, and don't come back till your cough

is better!' And I accepted the rebuke, as I hope, humbly—and asked him if I would be allowed to go to the great and wicked city and see my nephew managing a bigger parish than ever any of his kin did. And he said I could go anywhere so long as I didn't sit up nights with the sick. I lay it on you, Andrew, to see that I don't sit up nights with the sick. And so I'm here for a few days. After that I've promised the bishop and Kincaid that I'll tell them how to run their jobs for a week or so apiece. You're sure it's quite convenient? If it isn't, I can take Kincaid or Bishop Barrington first. But I wanted to see my boy."

"You don't know how convenient, nor how glad I am to see you!" said Anthony. He felt again the genuine loving-kindness which always pervaded the longest of Uncle Andrew's rambling, whimsical speeches, with their little touch of conscious picturesqueness. Well, in his day they'd had time for all that.

Anthony stirred up the Italian housekeeper, only to find she had plied the old man with much more food than was good for him. Uncle Andrew always did get looked after, somehow, though he was given to forgetting everything forgettable, and mislaying everything mislayable. 'Nunciata was already trotting around after him with the glasses and pencils and handkerchiefs which he had left in a trail behind him.

Anthony took his uncle down to an amateur performance of "The Land of Heart's Desire" and left him in the front row, making friends by means of

long-winded and sincere praises of the performers to their relatives, among whom he was planted. It was all so innocent and so simple that when Anthony passed downstairs from the gallery where his uncle sat to the less desirable seats where the staff was watching, and was recalled to his problem by the sight of Phœbe, with an adoring Italian flapper on one side, and John Angelo's graceful figure on the other, it was a shock like waking up. He did not think that Angelo was making actual love to Phœbe. But he could hear the two voices, both eager, both happy, both intent, and see the man's dusky, handsome face looking down into Phœbe's lovely little one, as if they two were the only people in the room.

"And on the shores of that lake," he heard Angelo saying raptly, "it is all one wash of pure deep color at twilight. One could stand there alone, or with just one person who could understand too—"

No—poor Fiammetta could not understand about washes of pure deep color, nor could she stand there with him at twilight and help him understand.

She was just an honest, earthly, loving creature John had outgrown. . . . Not so loving!

As Andrew Anthony passed, sick at heart, out the doorway, Fiammetta caught his arm.

"Do you see?" she whispered. "I tell you, if you do not stop him, make him come back to me, I will be able to bear it quietly no longer."

Fiammetta had not been bearing it, in the Anglo-Saxon sense, at all quietly. Anthony did not like the

implied threat. He would have to do something with one or the other of them.

Uncle Andrew chattered happily afterward about the play, and the people he had talked to. He had already sent word to Father Doughty by a canny daughter of Calabria, who managed to keep a foot in both churches, that he was here, and the father would be dropping in to see him next day.

Anthony tried to be interested and courteous, but the tangle that faced him made him distrait. If Uncle Andrew's wise old astigmatic eyes saw anything behind their owlish glasses, he made no sign of it.

Andrew lay awake most of the night.

How could he interfere? As man to man, he hadn't the right. And yet things were getting dangerous. Fiammetta was a wild animal under her blue serge suit. . . . Perhaps he could induce Phœbe to stay away . . . and yet, even that—wasn't it because he secretly wanted to keep her from Angelo for his own selfish reasons? . . .

Uncle Andrew had been established in the sitting room, next the study. To him were foregathered in the afternoon, not only Father Doughty, but, later, old Major Briggs, whom it appeared Uncle Andrew had run into after the major had finished his Salvation Army meeting the night before.

They were a contrast, Anthony thought as he passed the door! Uncle Andrew's lean height and half-precise, half-picturesque old figure, his caped coat about him

because of Annunciata's fussing over a draft, little Major Briggs' intense little ordinary weather-beaten face with its straggling sandy mustache, and Father Doughty's suave Irish bulk and twinkling-eyed geniality.

And yet there was a something identical on all three old faces, otherwise so different. Anthony could not place it quite, but it was there, even while they laughed together, light-heartedly, as old men may, over a tale of the father's. It was a something which made Anthony feel left out some way.

Perhaps it was only because he was young, with a great deal of his suffering still to do, while they were too old to have the realities of life still hurting them.

When he returned to await the Angelos they were still there. The three old heads were close together, and Uncle Andrew was telling a story now.

"It took ten years," he was saying matter-of-factly. "He wouldn't even discuss it for five. But he knew I was praying for him. After he had the stroke he seemed to want to see me. The last year he was eager. But he asked for baptism a month before he died; and I have never seen more wonderful faith in God than he showed up to the very end. He suffered a good deal, too—but I have never seen any one happier. It was wonderful to see him so close to God, after fighting so long."

The others nodded, and Major Briggs began to tell a story—evidently of the same sort. Anthony went

silently from the door. He had placed the look now. It was assurance—shining, steady assurance. They *knew* something. . . .

Anthony sat still under the portrait of old confident, portly Bishop West, and waited for Fiammetta and John Angelo. When they came there was a look of triumph on Fiammetta's face at having brought John up to be dealt with, which Anthony thought would have annoyed most men, even if they were not as high-strung as John.

He looked annoyed—almost sullen. She had probably half undone any work Anthony might do by reproaches or boasts of Anthony's partizanship, as they came along.

The very contrast of them seemed to point to the hopelessness of any understanding between them.

John spoke first—a little stiffly. "I understand you summoned us, Mr. Anthony?"

"It's not a question of summons, John. It's a question of something that I think we ought to talk over before you take any decisive step. As man to man. . . . It might be better, perhaps, without Fiammetta."

"No!" said Fiammetta doggedly. "This is my sorrow. I will know what is said of me."

Anthony went straight to the point: "John, I understand you want to divorce Fiammetta and remarry. Now, that isn't fair to Fiammetta. She's been a good wife to you; she's worked hard, and I believe helped you a good deal in your effort to get where you are.

It's going to hurt her a whole lot. With her attitude to life and her beliefs in general, there will be no life left for her. Won't you, at least, defer any action—think it over for a few months more?"

John answered him unbendingly: "I have thought over everything you have said for much more than a few months. I have deferred action for a long time. I can't see anything to do but this. Fiammetta and I had grown too far apart ever to come together again, long before I thought of remarrying. She is being hurt now by the fact of our relations being what they are, more than she can possibly be after I am gone from her. As for my marriage, that—pardon me—is surely my own affair?"

Blank wall. Anthony had spoken as man to man; as man to man John Angelo had answered him. There seemed no way to break through the wall; nevertheless he essayed again. "John, we've been good friends ever since I came down here. I've always done what I could to help you on the career you've done so splendidly with. My advice has always been pretty good—I think you'll admit that. And now I advise you that you're doing the wrong thing. You're not living according to the right ideals—the ideals that have carried you so far already."

Angelo's eyes flashed. "I am making two lives straighter, and leaving one no worse than it is now," he said.

Fiammetta was sobbing stormily into the skirt of her suit, as if it had been an apron.

Anthony went on pleading; but it was all of no use. The very quietness with which the other man took it all showed that he was far beyond being touched by any argument. As for Phœbe's name, that was skirted sacredly by both of them. And Anthony, always sensitive to the fact of his own love for Phœbe, felt himself bound in honor not to struggle as he would have struggled to keep them apart. . . . And the end was the usual end of all such arguments; Fiammetta lost her fragile self-control and stormed at both of them impartially.

"You call yourself a priest!" she told Anthony finally. "You are no priest. A priest would say to John: 'You are sinning! You must love your wife!' You say: 'As man to man!' What good is that? What good—oh, what good is anything!" She ended in another burst of weeping.

Angelo looked at his rector. "This is what you expect of me!" the look said. "Come, Fiammetta," was all he said aloud, and followed her out.

Anthony flung himself forward on the study table, sick at heart. He buried his head in his arms. He felt like echoing Fiammetta's "What good is anything?"

And yet—and yet what more could he do—what more, as a man and a gentleman, could he have done?

He felt a touch on his shoulder, and looked up into his uncle's face. But on that face was not pity, not sympathy—but contempt.

"I am ashamed of you, Andrew!" said his Uncle Andrew sternly.

"You wouldn't understand," said Andrew out of the depths of his failure and suffering. "I can't force dogma on them. I haven't it."

The old man whirled on him as fierily as poor Fiammetta had done.

"Dogma!" he cried. "Who asked you to have dogma? I'm not talking about dogma. What I'm talking about is belief—belief in God, belief in yourself, belief that you were put here to guide, not only these poor fools' bodies, but their souls—or if you don't believe in souls, their morals. What I'm ashamed of about you, Andrew Anthony, is that you don't know your own business, which is leadership. You don't believe in yourself. You apparently don't believe God put you here—I don't know that you even believe the vestry called you! What business have you to be at the head of a parish of human beings? Their morals are more your business than their skins and teeth. You don't think that if you keep a dog clean and healthy you're absolved from teaching him to keep his bones out of the parlor. You are wronging these human beings. You treat them worse than you would the dog."

"You don't understand. It's more complicated than that," faltered Andrew, sitting up and facing the old man. "I don't know how much you heard. But—the girl this man cares for happens to be a girl

I—care for—too. How can I be sure that my motives are decent, if I press him to stay with his wife?"

His anguished, earnest young face pleaded for compassion, but his uncle did not give it.

"You don't have to be," he answered uncompromisingly. "Great guns, boy, don't you know *how* to be a minister of God? You have nothing whatever to do, in your private capacity, with guiding these people in your capacity as their leader and clergyman. Your private feelings don't matter. They wouldn't matter if they were tied up with the man's wife. They don't matter as it is. That's plain egotism. *You* don't count. . . . Good heavens, if any of you boys of the younger generation, with all your splendid capacities for service, had half the faith in yourselves and your mission to lead that any little Bolshevik leader has, you'd hold the world steady! You don't know this, and don't know that; and you haven't any faith in the God back of you. You're trying to do it on your own hook."

Anthony had forgotten his hurt. He was staring at old Uncle Andrew's sternly lighted face. All the old man's easy whimsicality had dropped like a mask, showing the prophet behind.

"You are in a position of authority," his uncle went on sternly. "You must do one of two things. Either believe that you have been put here to guide these people, believe that God did it, believe in yourself, and *do* it, with all the faith and selflessness and common sense you've got, or—*quit*. The woman was right.

You have no business to deal as man to man, or man to woman, with your flock. You are God's minister to them. If you can't believe that and make them believe it, go and manage a secular settlement house somewhere. I hear you do it very well."

Andrew put up his hand. "That'll do, uncle," he said. "You've said enough. You're right. I've failed. I—I suppose I *had* forgotten God."

But his uncle was not through with him. "That being the case, what are you going to do? You can't leave this thing at loose ends, any more than a doctor could a case."

Anthony rose wearily. "I—I don't know. I suppose I can act, as you said, without considering my own part of the affair, inasmuch as I'm—quitting."

The old man touched him gently on the shoulder. "Don't take it so hard, boy. Many a man has mistaken his vocation for a while before this."

Anthony sat thinking after his uncle had gone out. . . . Belief in God's appointment of him over these people, belief in himself, selflessness, common sense—he had none of these, but he could at least act as if he had them, for the little while before his resignation was accepted.

He went to Angelo the next day. He did not plead, or argue as man to man. He ordered.

"You've been behaving in a way that's wrong in the sight of God," he said briefly. "You and I both believe in some sort of God, anyway, and we know that's so. You're to stop. You're to take poor little

Fiammetta out to that place by the side of a lake, where you and she can be alone together. You're to stop feeling that she isn't American enough for you. You fell in love with her when she was Italian; let her stay Italian, not try to be what she can't. You're to stop thinking of the other woman as your wife. You'd no more be happy with her than Fiammetta is with you—there's more fundamental difference of viewpoint between you and Phœbe Rockingham than ever will be between you and Fiammetta. You can paint out there. You'll be away from this city life that you Italians aren't used to. You'll have a fair chance of happiness."

He was violating every rule he had ever laid down for himself in the conduct of his parish. But he had to straighten this thing out—in the name of God, he had to straighten it out. He no longer counted. He did not know what would happen. What did happen was amazing; Giovanni Angelo poured forth a flood of half-mad angry words; impossible things, vulgar things, brutal things—a harmless enough performance from the point of view of the angry Sicilian peasant. But—this thing might have happened some day to Phœbe—this impossible thing. His way was clear from then. He went on quietly, using the weapon he knew would be most effective, without any scruple:

"If you do not take Fiammetta and, without any backward look, try to be happy with her out in that place, wherever it is, which I heard you picturing to Miss Rockingham, I will see to it that the patrons

we have interested in you and your art are interested no more. I will shut you off from everything that makes your success and happiness if you do not obey me. Now choose, and choose quickly."

He stood in Angelo's little room, outwardly immovable. Angelo, flushed, hysterical, walked the floor clenching and unclenching his hands, and pouring forth a flood of words partly in Italian and partly in English, addressed, it seemed, sometimes to himself—sometimes angrily to Anthony. The tension of it seemed eternal. He was stringing himself up higher and higher. Anthony thought he would never stop.

Suddenly something in Angelo broke, and he flung himself prone on the floor in a flood of tears; angry, loud sobs. And when Anthony bent over him and put one hand on his shoulder he struck it off, sprang up passionately and ran out of the room.

Andrew Anthony went back to his own place, feeling that he had failed. He did not want to see any one in the world, he felt. He wished he need never face Uncle Andrew, in particular, again. But Uncle Andrew no more and no less scholarly and conversational and amiable than usual, was not hard to meet after all.

When the meal was over, Anthony realized that he had been talking interestedly of his childhood, and the old rectory in Germantown, of wardens and wardens' wives long dead, and children long grown up and scattered, and that it had done him good. He had stopped for an hour the eternal facing of the situation, and he

had strength for his next step, which was to deal, as minister to one of his flock in need of ministry, with Phœbe Rockingham, with whom he was deeply in love. If he only needn't, unfit as he was for his work; if he could only quit now instead of after he had seen the vestry—

But perhaps he did not deal the worse with her for having no hope and no future, though it seemed to him that he had done it ruinously, when, heart-sick and aghast, he went out from the classroom where she had been awaiting some of her girls.

At the first few words her cheeks burned scarlet, and her soft lips closed tight.

He had hurt her pride horribly, he could see that. It is not an easy thing to tell a woman that she must stop having anything to do with another man, and why. She said very little, as he blundered, relentlessly on—scarcely more, indeed, than "Is that all?" when he had finished, and "I think you are wrong about John Angelo. I am sure he is a good and very wonderful man." After that, she made him feel, his audience was over.

He went out, baffled, knowing less, he felt, of Phœbe Rockingham than he ever had. Yet of one thing he was sure: she was perfectly innocent, perfectly noble. If she could go on believing in Angelo, it was because she did not think any one could be otherwise than as good as his highest belief in himself. And yet—

No one knew where the Angelos were. No one

knew where Phœbe Rockingham was. All that there was to it was that Miss Rockingham had said that she couldn't come down any more. Got tired of it, like most volunteers: that was the paid workers' verdict on it. As for the Angelos, there had been a scene that was worse than usual, and Angelo had gone away. Later Fiammetta had talked with the priest, and the old gentleman who was his friend and some other kind of priest—but, oh, a priest of the most good—one could see that! and that was the last known. Andrew Anthony, white and forcedly cheerful, went among his flock as he had never gone before, helping, consoling, toiling harder than even the little old Salvationist.

All he knew was that his uncle said Fiammetta had come and talked to him. He had advised her to go home and try once more for a reconciliation with her husband, and ordered her to stop talking. She had said she would.

Andrew Anthony called a meeting of the vestry the following week. They were strong-faced, intent men of affairs all; men of the uptown church of which the Memorial Church was an offshoot bigger than the parent. As Andrew Anthony faced them, he despaired of making them understand. He had done well by their work. He had made it show results. They would think he was a quitter. Well, that wasn't his affair. He, who had never run the church as if he was a minister of God, had no right to stay there. It was for him to tell them so, and leave.

"I've called you together to offer you my resigna-

tion," he began abruptly. "I'm going to give you my reasons for it, as they've been burned into me in the last fortnight; and then, as soon as you can make arrangements for my successor, I'm quitting the ministry."

There was a murmur of surprise, and he could hear a little rustling and stiffening to attention.

"We shall be sorry to let you go," said old Mr. Vanderweyde weightily, looking up from under his bushy eyebrows. He was senior warden. "You have done a splendid work with the Memorial. I think I speak for the whole vestry in hoping that you will not act hastily."

There was a nodding and murmured assent from the others. Then they waited for Anthony to speak again.

He felt that there was no possibility of making these men, whose lives had been given to practical affairs and worldly things, understand even what he meant. But nevertheless it had to be said.

"I've been running this church as a business venture," he began. "I've tried to run it successfully. From a business standpoint, I have. Till last week I thought I was a wonder at it. I thought the old idea about being a shepherd and a leader and a father to your flock was sentimental nonsense. I haven't a doubt that most of you remember my saying smugly: 'I do not arrogate to myself authority. I am a brother to these people—a seeker.'

"Well, I was wrong. I wasn't even a seeker. I

didn't believe there was a thing to seek—I thought I had it all here; I thought that a decreased death rate in the district, and a decrease in crime statistics, and a child or two given a chance at violin lessons, made up the sum of all there was to do.

"I've learned better. I've been faced with the necessity to lay down laws for the spiritual and moral guidance of these people. And I have found that the things the Bible's full of are facts, not picturesque phrases. The life *is* more than meat, and the body more than raiment. My people have needed what I cannot give them. Somebody else may. That's why I'm resigning."

The ice-blue eyes and heavy white face of another of the vestry turned toward him.

"We cannot agree with you as to the lack of necessity for a lowered death rate and crime rate," he said a little sharply.

"This ought I to have done," said Andrew Anthony, *"and not left the other undone."*

"You are under—perhaps—a little nervous strain," said old Mr. Vanderweyde soothingly.

"Yes," he said, "I am, and no wonder. I'm facing the fact that I haven't believed in myself or in God; and that when the time came for me to enforce spiritual and moral laws, my people wouldn't accept my leadership. They were willing enough, as the woman in the case told me, to accept a religion made up of taking baths and learning English! God gave the

leadership of these people into my hands, and I have been a false shepherd. I have failed Him, and failed the church, and made it fail by so much. I—I am going. That is all. I shall mail you my formal resignation."

He turned and walked out of the room.

He walked the city streets that night till nearly morning. The thing was done. And now that it was done, all the regrets and griefs he had not known himself to have, rushed over him. For a little while even the terror and uncertainty about Phœbe faded before the awful sense he had of loss of vocation. Now that he had given it up, he knew how deeply the love of ministry was in his soul. By ancestry and training and vocation he was a priest, a member of the profession which locks its sons to it with a deeper love than any in the world; which leaves something lost and miserable in their souls to the end of their days if they forsake it.

He did not know it, but his people looked at him with a new reverence as he went through the succeeding days, waiting till his resignation should be formally accepted. He was suffering so much that he had no time left to think how they thought of him, or indeed to think of himself at all. All he could think of was Phœbe, when the quiet tying up of loose ends gave him a moment to think of anything outside of the Memorial Church. He had telephoned her house uptown, only to be told that Miss Rockingham was away, and they

did not know when she would return. The tone of the maid who answered him—he imagined—was repressive, as if she had been given exact orders what to tell people. If it had not been for his uncle, Anthony would, he felt, scarcely have had the courage to go through what he was going through. He clung to him as if he were a little boy again. They only talked to each other of surface things. Anthony did not feel as if he could stand anything else.

Only once Uncle Andrew referred to anything that had passed. "I wouldn't worry about Miss Rockingham," he said. "I am sure she is safe, wherever she is, and good. I know you can trust her."

There was such a certainty in his uncle's voice that Anthony's fears, for the time, were quieted. . . .

He had come to the point of determining to go to her people and ask about her, and, if he had no satisfaction, taking steps to have her traced, when, one afternoon nearly at the end of his time for staying, he had a short note from her.

"We didn't finish talking," it said. "Will you meet me at Grand Central this afternoon and go out in the train, and finish what you were saying?"

The relief was nearly agony. Yet it might mean the worst as well as the best. He knew where to meet her. They had made all-afternoon excursions into the country before this, though it had usually been with a bodyguard of small children.

She was just herself, flushed, slim, and childlike,

waving to him gaily from the usual place of meeting in the great station. In the delight of seeing her again he forget to ask her anything; their hands clung together and they laughed like children.

She laughed still as they rode out together. "I have a surprise," she said. "Something wonderful! But I forgot—I mustn't tell you. I promised not."

His heart made one of its agonizing leaps, and he found himself flung into terror again. But he would trust her. He *would*.

But they had an hour of wandering in the spring woods before they came to anything but buds and young leaves and an occasional bird or squirrel. Anthony enjoyed himself because of her presence, with a desperate holding fast to the present minute. There might never be any more minutes like it. . . . And at last they came to a little brook, and followed its course up to a low gray stone wall.

"Look!" Phœbe said. A flash of color darted through the wood beyond the wall, and Fiammetta Angelo ran to them, flinging her hands abroad to them both, with a burst of rapid greeting. She was a transformed being. She was dressed in the costume of her own country, and her cheeks were bright and her skin brown with living outdoors. Presently Anthony became aware, through his bewilderment, that she was asking his pardon for being so rude to him before, and thanking him—oh, but ten thousand grateful thanks! And they had obeyed him, and done

as the old gentleman he sent to them had said, and they were so happy in the country, and Giovanni had painted already the most wonderful picture! And finally Phœbe—with almost as many and as happy words—drew him on. "We didn't want to tell you till we were sure it was going to work permanently," she was saying as they sped back to the city. "But it really does work. I *was* angry with you at first. You thought things of me that I—I didn't like. But I went away to my cousin's place a little while, and thought about it. And you were right. I'm too young to be running around institutional churches without a keeper."

The eager words on his lips were checked by the vision of Uncle Andrew, waving them eagerly at the station gate with his umbrella.

"Did you see them? Now aren't you glad your old uncle blew you up?" he demanded eagerly.

Anthony grasped his uncle's hand. With this wonderful new hope he could almost forget the revelation of his own unfitness that meant that West Memorial was his no longer.

"Glad—" he said unsteadily. "Even if I have to start all over again—"

The two eager creatures beside him cried out, and Uncle Andrew laughed.

"I left the vestry, headed by Jimmy Vanderweyde, kneeling at my feet in rows like the peers proposing to Iolanthe," he said. "They won't take no for an

answer. . . . I don't see why they need to have it for an answer myself. You've won your spurs, boy."

Andrew Anthony looked at Phœbe. Her little warm hand came down intimately on his arm, and she looked up at him with a vivid certainty in her face.

"Indeed—indeed you have, Andrew," she said.

WILD WOODLAND

Dr. Blanton enjoyed, as he did most things in life, being shown over the settlement-church: but his politest endeavors could not conceal from his nephew that the people in it, workers and benefited alike, interested him fatally more than methods or apparatus. It was a little trying to have him ignore the pride of Phœbe's life, the swimming-pool, in favor of a small and very soiled child on its brink who would not believe that it was best to be washed before you went swimming; it was almost more than trying to find him discoursing in the middle of the library about a fine bit of incunabula found in a Memphis settlement house—presented, according to his leisurely tale, by a grateful Nuremburg Jew who could not read.

"It was very instructive," said Uncle Andrew with innocent pride. "I went on the principle that somewhere in that ancestry had been scholarship, as the book had always been in the family's possession—even though that family was sunk in illiteracy now. People do not believe enough in heredity, my dear children. And sure enough, the second daughter . . ."

She was now an authority on Greek texts, it appeared; but they switched him to the filing-system, where slim, blue-eyed Silence Everington was waiting alertly for them. But his reaction:

"Miss Everington is either a New Englander or a Virginian of practically pure English stock, isn't she? She gives me the impression of having something on her mind. You wouldn't object to humoring my inquisitiveness to the extent of having her to tea this afternoon, would you, my dear Phœbe?"

Phœbe squeezed Dr. Blanton's hand.

"There's no use worrying you—you shall see what you want to see, and if you want to watch the wheels go round in Silence instead of in the Settlement, why, you shall! Only there aren't any. The Settlement is the only thing she ever loved—I'm sorry to say. Nothing else has a look in."

Uncle Andrew pulled his little pointed beard and looked wise.

"I judge, from your connotation of accent, that something or rather some one else does want—a slight glance within, did you say?"

Phœbe clapped her hands. She had the gestures of enthusiasm which become second nature to settlement workers.

"You shall see! I will produce it this afternoon."

"It" proved to be a tall, grave, excellently mannered man named Nicholas Venino; at sight of whom Silence Everington looked at Phœbe with reproach. He had gray eyes, he spoke perfect English, and it came out incidentally in the conversation that he had gone through Columbia and was doing very well in business. Apparently these facts did not have much interest for Uncle Andrew; he was more absorbed in

talking ethics and politics with him, and watching Silence Everington.

"I like that boy," he said to her, when Venino was gone. "He seems to have standards; which, of course, are more necessary than collegiate education, though it isn't fashionable to say so."

"Yes. He has very high standards," said Silence stiffly. She flushed a little, and went on talking, as if she thought she had been too constrained and wanted not to seem so. "He is really a wonderful man. He was a Memorial child. He came here all by himself, they say, not even sent by his mother; and used all the help he got here very efficiently. He put himself through college. He helps the Italians down here a great deal; tries to shake them out of their ideas about—well—"

"About the Ten Commandments being merely a decoration, not a code?" interrupted Uncle Andrew.

"Yes—how did you know?"

But Uncle Andrew only smiled, and began to ask her questions about her forebears. They finally dug up a distant cousinship, through a Master Merriton who had divided his sons between Delaware and New Hampshire. It was nearly dinner time before they parted.

"Well?" said Phœbe when they were alone.

"I'm afraid you'll think me romantic—which, in fact, I chronically am, my dear. But I think your efficient Miss Everington does not live here at all; but in her dreams. She has *'nostalgie du passe.'* I

confess to having it myself sometimes—for something that died when they fired the first shot on a place called Fort Sumter:

'For a time now far away,
A belief now in its grave—'

or, I sometimes fear, very nearly," said Uncle Andrew cryptically. He knew nearly everything he had ever read by heart, which made his conversation fuller of quotations than most people were prepared for.

"But I don't see what you mean—nor what it has to do with her treatment of Mr. Venino," said downright Phœbe.

"Curiously enough, I think he may. He struck me as extremely clever, that young man. But of course, when her nervous breakdown takes real shape—"

"What?" said Phœbe.

"It's only that I've seen other women, of very much her type. A type that is decreasing, by the way, with all its virtues, as it is extremely selective in marriage. Two New Englanders like her, and three Virginians. And, as well as one can judge from her portraits, Anne Ascue of Bloody Mary's day."

She was so certain that he was wrong that he did not finish, except to say mildly, "But it does work with horses, you know!" and then diverge courteously to the present-day neglect of Pope's poetry.

What moved Nicholas Venino, a very silent person

normally, to deliberately seek an interview with Uncle Andrew, no one could imagine. A whimsical and bookish old gentleman who continually loses his glasses seems the last person in the world to attract a hard-working young merchant descended from one of the world's most practical races. But nevertheless he did. Perhaps, as Uncle Andrew had said, he was very clever.

"I saw you were sorry for me," he said quite without preface when they were alone.

Uncle Andrew adjusted his glasses.

"Not exactly—sorry for you. I have a great deal of faith in the power of youth to help itself. But I confess to wondering—just a little—being a curious-minded old man—how you would. You don't mind?"

The quick answer was more picturesque than an American's would have been, and less self-conscious:

"What can I do? I have done everything—made myself everything that America asks. I could give her all she wanted; I live as she would have me—she, with her cold heights! I have made myself, how hardly she will never know, into what I thought she would wish. Not for her sake alone. I—I desire what is right. . . . I have seen her look with kind aloofness—and I know what thoughts under that aloofness—at uncontrolled ones of my race. But I am not uncontrolled. I am—I think you would be told—honorable. I—but it is all no use. There is a barrier that she cannot cross, though I have often thought that she would love me if she thought I was

of her kind. She resents us all, though she works all day very wonderfully to give us help. . . . Us . . . I suppose that is it. I am one of the slum children to her—I would be, if I came with the crown of all Italy or the money of all America!"

Uncle Andrew's slow answer did not seem to be to the point.

"Did you ever hear the idea that sometimes you must give a thing up before it really can become yours?"

"If she could only forget the hills she can scarcely remember from her childhood—the ancestors who have been buried so long, who built America, as God knows, I desire to build in this day—"

The old man looked thoughtful.

"I understand," he said, "that you are a well-to-do young man. What I think you should do is—give her back those hills for a little while. She is overtired now. See to it, without her knowledge, that there is money enough for her to go back to New Hampshire. . . . Perhaps she is right and you are wrong, Venino. There is a lot, after all, in this heredity business. You can't always fight it. I'm fond of Delaware, myself; and I don't doubt that the fact that a man named John Blanton liked its looks two hundred years ago and settled there biases me a good deal. . . . It's a big sacrifice, Nicholas—you don't mind my calling you that? But as you can't get her to give you what you want, why don't you give her

what she wants? It seems to me, if you really love her, that's the next best thing."

"The wall of ghosts would be thicker about her than ever! My last chance would be gone."

"Nevertheless. . . ." said Uncle Andrew.

. . . . . .

Hill-roads always wind like an adventure, even in the heavy heat of summer; and in September, when the blue haze is beginning to lie across the distances, and the little fresh winds have a stimulating thrill to them. New England hill-roads feel like a path to all the wonderful things one had almost forgotten. They wind a little upwards, and the woodland closes in on either side of them. Here and there an old house, shuttered close because the people who lived there are dead long ago, or moved far west, stands wistfully beside the road, with the hardier garden-flowers still thrusting through the grass and weeds.

Silence Everington's people had been of this country, but she herself had never known it. She had been brought up in New York, and in her vacations there had always been somewhere else to go; usually, for she worked altogether too conscientiously, and had not much money, a place where she took charge of the summer outing of the little children from her settlement. She was a settlement worker, and for the six years she had been following her profession she had lived in it with the missionary intensity of her ancestors. But this year she was overtired, and the doctor

had sent her flying to the New Hampshire hills, with orders to forget everything but herself and her pleasure. She was staying at a camp, but mostly she took her pleasure alone, wandering up and down the hill-roads and dreaming. She forgot New York and the work she loved so easily that it surprised her. The vague feeling of belonging somewhere else which had always teased her, underneath her busy, intense days, was gone. She belonged here. All her people were gone, but the hills, and the woodland with its blue haze, were here still, and they made her very happy. Sometimes she rode Peter, the old camp horse, who had been the means of teaching so many generations of girls to ride that his attitude to humanity was a scornful and embittered one, and his mouth absolutely hard; more often she went afoot with a little packet of lunch, and a heavy cape in deference to the ideas of Miss Martinson, the head of the camp, who was chronically afraid that everybody would catch cold. The cape was flung over one arm, and sometimes she sat on it in a very damp spot of woods. She never wore it. She was slim and pale, with the transparent skin and deep blue eyes which make people feel that their owners aren't strong, but she was as tireless, ordinarily, as any Silence or Hopestill of her ancestry.

She thought a good deal about her people as she walked elastically up a little hill-road this September day, the wind blowing her red-brown hair back from her face, and whipping her cheeks delightfully. They had been a good stock, but they were dead. There

were no more Everingtons, so far as she knew. And the race would be dead when she died. She was only twenty-eight, but she knew that she would never marry. The man she belonged with—the man she should have married—well, he wasn't, and that was all there was to it. Some of the girls she knew laughed at her for her attitude; but she held steadfastly to it. If she found him, or if he found her, they would be married. If not—and after all, she was not in her first youth any more—then she would be the last Everington. They came from all sorts of homes and classes, the girls who worked with her at the settlement; from Phœbe Rockingham, whose people were millionaires, to little Stella Karsovian, daughter of Armenian refugees ten years over. But none of them were New Englanders. She said that fiercely to herself. None of them had her heritage of generation after generation, living sternly and hard in their rocky farms, and always holding high the ideals they had brought to a far country, when coming to it meant hardship and suffering, not a better chance for soft living in a richer land.

She laughed a little at herself, arguing as intensely about it as if she were talking to Nicholas Venino, instead of safe and alone up in the hills of her people. Nicholas wanted to marry her. And Phœbe said she was silly to fight him off so. He was an Italian from the North country, tall and gray-eyed: grave, too, unlike the chattering swarthy Sicilians she had learned to know first as Italians. He had been a Memorial

settlement child, in the day before Silence came to work there, when the Memorial was a new thing. He had grown up, one of the boys they pointed to as an evidence of the work they could do. He had gone through Columbia, and he was prospering as an importer. Oh, you couldn't say he wasn't presentable —but couldn't they see it went deeper than that? All the ideals, all the feelings, all the hopes were different. Silence had come up here to flee from Nicholas and his pleadings as much as to rest. She shuddered now as she thought of his open, passionate, boyish love-making. It didn't make the least bit of difference who was around. And once when she had told him in desperation that she cared for another man, his expression had frightened her. He had got himself in hand quickly, but he had looked so like poor little Vergilio, who had been sent up the day before for slashing his wife Silvia with a razor, "because of her too great beauty and her too loving eyes to others," as he had explained to Silence quietly.

She shook herself free from settlement memories, and plunged down a wood-path that might come out on another road, in the middle of a village cross-roads, or never at all. She delighted in the adventure of the thing. And even if she got lost, she had lunch and didn't need to get back till nightfall.

The woods slanted downhill, a close undergrowth of slim young trees. Once she came across the foundations of a house, just the cellar and the bricks stand-

ing up about it. It hadn't been torn or burned down so very long, as time is counted. Where the front yard had been, among an upgrowth of laurel and young trees and bushes, a child's toy, an old-fashioned iron engine, was still half-buried in the earth among vines and flowers. She went on down past it with her eyes filled with irrational, sentimental tears. They had been there too, her people, and they were gone. The wild woodland was taking back what had been snatched from it with such stern toil, so long ago. She hurried on down through the fresh, thrilling air, till she had come again to a spot where it was all woods; down again and still down. She was happy again by now. In these woods she was back at home. She wondered gaily if she was going to find her way out for hours. She didn't care.

But presently there was another break in the undergrowth, and she halted a little, seeing a glimmer of a house through the slender trees. As she came closer, still not quite sure whether she was infringing on private property, she saw it clearly. It was a big white house, Colonial, with the wide low porch, almost on the ground, which she liked so particularly. The garden before it was carefully tended; hollyhocks, tall and glowing, were massed along the porch-front, and the stalks of golden-glow made a hedge within the white palings. There were beds of monthly roses, too, and of old-fashioned white pinks. Up here summer lingered late. It had sprung out of the wood-

land like a fairy-tale. Behind the house she could see farmland spreading away, fields of corn and of brown earth.

She paused a little wistfully at the palings, looking in. It was like the places her mother used to tell her of, not the half-deserted, overgrown places she knew. As she stood gazing, an old lady opened the door of the house, and came out to sit on the porch in the afternoon sun. She stood with her hand shading her eyes, tall, white-haired and benignant, looking across the garden to the woodland whence Silence had come, and seeing her, smiled and beckoned:

"Won't you come up and sit awhile?" she called. "I'm watching for my son to come home. Come up and sit, and watch too."

Silence opened the gate, with a little difficulty, and came up the walk.

"I'm glad to see you," said the old lady. "It's lonely hereabouts, though it's beautiful—don't you think so? I like to have a neighbor drop in. And who are you, my dear? I don't remember you. But you have a New England look. I am sure you must belong in these parts."

Silence sat lightly on the porch edge, and smiled up at her questioner, nodding.

"Oh, yes, I belong in these parts, though my people came away when I was a child," she said. "My name is Everington—Silence Everington. My mother's name was Martha Bradford. They belonged here in New Hampshire."

"Ah, I knew it, my dear! You have the Everington look. And they named you after the Silence Everington who gave the alarm when the British were coming, over in Zanesbury. I'm a Zane, myself. We remember each other, we old country folk!"

Silence laughed and glowed. She had nearly forgotten the story of the ancestress for whom she was named. And nobody else in the world, she would have said, knew or cared anything about Everingtons or Zanes or Bradfords; or cherished useless old legends.

"I feel as if I had come back home!" she said warmly, looking up at old Mrs. Zane.

"So you have, my dear. But you shouldn't have left it. It's all very well to talk about the pioneer instinct, but when our ancestors got here I think they'd pioneered far enough. Do you see any one coming? It's time my boy was back."

Silence looked in the direction she was shown, but saw nothing.

"Sometimes he's very late," said old Mrs. Zane smilingly. "But he's a dear boy. He always tries to be with me as much as he can."

Her fine, weather-beaten old face lighted up as she spoke of her son. He must be a good man, Silence thought, if she was so happy in him. He must be old, though, Mrs. Zane herself seemed so old. She visualized him, a tall, strong-featured man like her own father, broad-shouldered, brown, middle-aged, coming across the fields to see his mother, perhaps with a child or two clinging to his hand, or with his whole-

some wife beside him, as sunset drew near. It all seemed like the sort of thing she had always wanted and never quite believed was anywhere.

"I think he's coming early to-night," Mrs. Zane's clear, deliberate old country voice broke in on her thoughts. She had forgotten to look with her hostess, but now she raised her eyes, and saw, close at hand, the man they had been waiting for—for Silence had been drawn into Mrs. Zane's mood sufficiently to wait almost as eagerly as she.

He was not like Nicholas. That was the first thing she thought, unconsciously comparing him with her Italian lover. He was something as she had pictured him, tall and broad-shouldered, Yankee-built, but much younger than she had supposed. He could not have been more than a couple of years her senior. He had the shrewd, kindly blue eyes she knew so well—eyes with yet a dreaming light in them, the light Silence knew was in her own. As he stood there for a moment without speaking, he reminded her strongly of some one, she could not think whom till he bent and kissed his mother, then looked a little inquiringly at the guest. He was very like an old painting, one of the few things she had kept of vanished grandeurs, an ancestor who had been a colonial governor. It was the same thin, proud, distinguished face, except for the difference made by youth and life. These people were doubtless far-off cousins.

"This is my son," said old Mrs. Zane, looking up at him with infinite affection, but not touching him, after

that first embrace, as a more demonstrative woman would have done.

"This is Silence Everington, David."

David Zane spoke to her—a little distantly, it seemed to her at first. He did not touch her hand.

Silence had put too many shy people at their ease in the course of her work to mind his lack of cordiality. She smiled at him, and taking the first point of contact which occurred to her, asked if they were descended from her governor ancestor. The mother replied:

"Yes, indeed—didn't you know that? The Everingtons and the Zanes married each other right along. You and David must be cousins two or three times, distantly."

David interrupted her, affectionately.

"Now, mother dear, when you get on genealogy there's no knowing when you'll stop. Do you like ancestors too, Miss Everington?"

Silence flushed and nodded.

"I hadn't thought about them much, down in the city. But up here it's all come back to me. Coming here, finding this lovely old house and both of you, makes all of it seem real; all the people behind me, all the traditions."

"I have never been anywhere but here," said David, with a note of wistfulness in his voice.

"Oh, but it is so beautiful! To look over those fields of corn and all the acres behind them, and feel that they have belonged to your people since hun-

dreds of years, with no change, and no problems but seedtime and harvest—"

"She knows, David! She sees things the right way!" interposed old Mrs. Zane almost passionately.

He made no answer, except to look at Silence with eyes that she could not but feel were worshipful.

"Yes, you belong to our people," he said musingly at length. "You belong here."

His mother spoke again.

"There are hollyhocks along the stone wall, yonder, planted from seeds brought from England when the Zanes came from the ship to this farm. Show them to her, my son. I am getting too old to move about much."

She leaned back in her chair, smiling. She seemed very happy.

The two young people rose, and moved side by side down the walk and over to the long, low stone wall, overgrown by the tall hollyhocks. Clematis was winding over the wall, too, its sweet white flowers knotted in among the hollyhock stalks. Silence bent down and buried her face in the clusters of perfumed, feathery whiteness.

"May I have some?" she asked, smiling at David. She felt somehow as if she had known David forever; as if he were some one she had forgotten about for some strange reason, and just now come back to, happily remembering.

He smiled back at her, a quiet, sad smile that was familiar.

"You may have everything that we can give you. You belong to us—you have said so," he told her. She knelt by the low wall to break one of the long tangled clematis vines, twisted about stone and flower-stalk, and his hands, close to hers, thrilled her. They were strong, and knotted as if by outdoor work, yet finely modelled. As she made a final effort to break the tough strands of the vine, they touched hers. They were both kneeling by the wall, and they looked into each other's eyes. The blue fire of his met the gray fire of hers.

"You belong to us," he said again in that low, steady voice like his mother's. . . . "Don't you know you do?"

"I—I think I have come home," said Silence as reverently.

They were both still for awhile after that.

He was the lover she had wanted always; the man of her own kind she had wished, half-unconsciously, for, all the years she had been working alone down in the city where things went on, always on and ahead in a swift current. He was here, with the eyes and look and voice of her own people, and he said that she belonged here—here where things did not change, where things were as they had always gone. She realized, as they rose, still silently and as one, and wandered back through the grounds, gathering the flowers and saying scarcely anything to each other, that her expectation of some day finding what she had found had been the only bar to her marrying Nicholas Ve-

nino. She had been nearer loving Nicholas than she had known. She thought on him now, daring to face her affection for him fearlessly, in her new knowledge of having come home to David Zane. Ardent, good, handsome, successful, forward-looking—she had never half done Nicholas justice. She hoped he would marry soon, perhaps pretty Stella Karsovian, perhaps some lovely young Italian girl, if there was one good enough for him. And she looked up at David, striding there silently by her in the sunset, along the narrow path by the corn.

She never could remember, afterwards, all the things they had said to each other, out there, straying about in the sunset light. Their minds fitted so that it was almost like thinking aloud. He loved her and she loved him, and they had always belonged together, and now they had found each other. Those were the things they told one another. It did not seem strange that it should have happened as soon as they met.

"It would have been stranger if it hadn't happened. We know we are each other's. Why pretend it isn't so?" David said, echoing the thought in her mind, as they paused a little in the last rays of the sun, by an old stile.

She turned and looked up at him, and he swept her into his arms. They stood locked together, forgetting time and space, in that last wonderful light of sunset.

How long it was before she drew away from him she never knew. It seemed suddenly dark, and across

the chilly darkness she heard a scream—his mother's voice. It shook her from her trance, and she fled back through the corn-path, across the lawn, stumbling as she went over stumps and vines, back to the old house, outdistancing David. She ran, panting, around the corner of the house and up on the porch. It was dark and lonely, but she could see Mrs. Zane, screaming and struggling, her arm held by a rough-looking man. She remembered with a thrill of horror how lonely it was here, how shut about with undergrowth excepting on the side whence she had come.

"David! David! Hurry!" she cried, as she sprang up on the porch, and tried to wrest the old lady from the man's hold. He dropped the thin arm he held, at once, and began to talk vehemently in a broken English that she could hardly follow.

"She no come in—I have to make her come in, or she sit here all night," was what she thought she made out, interspersed with a language she thought sounded like Portuguese or Spanish. It sounded to Silence like a ridiculous excuse. He had been about to maltreat the old lady. Oh, if David would only hurry! Could it be that he had not heard his mother scream, and had walked on in another direction—that she would have to stay here and contend with this man she was afraid of?

"I must wait for David! I must wait for David! I tell you he was here to-night! I must wait for my son! Tell him, Silence, that David will be back soon!" said Mrs. Zane piteously.

Silence did not know what to make of it.

"It cannot matter to you whether Mrs. Zane waits till her son come in," she said, addressing the man. He answered her in a flood of words she could not follow, pointing excitedly first to the house and then to Mrs. Zane. And as she listened to him in perplexity, she heard, with a throb of thankfulness, a man's footsteps hurrying around the house, and, turning, saw his shape coming up the two low steps to the porch. She ran to him, and had caught his arm, thinking it was David. Then she recoiled in astonishment. Close to him, like that, she could see that it was Nicholas Venino—Nicholas, whom she had depended on to do things she wanted done for years. She was too glad of his protection to be surprised that he was there. Even if David delayed a little it did not matter now.

"Thank heaven I've found you!" said Nicholas, keeping hold of her as if to reassure himself. "You could never have found your way back alone. What's the matter here? Are you helping some one in trouble, as usual?"

She had forgotten how comfortable it was to turn to Nicholas for help.

"This man is trying to do something to Mrs. Zane, here. I can't understand him. Her—her son will be back in a minute. I was trying to protect her."

"Of course you were, if there was anything to protect, little Saint Silence!" he said. "But I don't think anything is wrong. They told me about this place at the camp, when I came up to find you. The man

looks after her. He and his wife live a little way from here, and take care of her and do her work. Perhaps I could understand him—I know a little Spanish."

Silence, frightened and mystified still, heard Nicholas question the man rapidly in Spanish, and listen attentively to his patois reply. He nodded, when the man had done, and turned to Silence again. Mrs. Zane, meanwhile, had sunk back into her chair and was peering through the darkness again.

"It is as I told you," said Nicholas. "This old lady lives here alone. This man and his wife, who is in the kitchen now getting her meal, are paid by a relative of hers, a man who lives in the far west, to look after her. It was getting dark, and too cold for so old a woman to stay out on the porch. He was trying to get her to come in and eat something. But she was insisting on staying here to watch longer. He says that sometimes for days she does not give any trouble. To-night was a bad night."

"But—but I don't understand," Silence faltered again. "Her son and I went down through the cornfield, for a walk in the sunset. We were standing by the stile together when I heard Mrs. Zane scream. I ran; I thought he would follow. I don't understand why he isn't here. He—he *must* be here in a moment. She is only watching for him. Aren't you, Mrs. Zane?"

It was too dark for her to see the look of shock and surprise on Nicholas' face. She waited for the old lady's answer.

"You see!" Mrs. Zane said triumphantly. "I told you he came sometimes—never, never when people do not believe in him. He came to-night, and talked with Silence. Let me watch a little longer—only a little longer!"

Nicholas drew Silence to him quickly, but not as a lover would; more as if she were a child he must guard.

"Listen, my little one," he said gently. "There is no son. Miss Zane has never married. Listen—hold still—try to believe! I understand—this man might understand—we are Latins. But never the people at the camp. You were *incantata*—there is an English word for it—wait—glamour. She threw over you the belief that is so strong in her—"

"But I saw him! I saw him!" cried Silence, struggling to escape Nicholas' sane, strong hold. "He had the face of the picture in my room."

"Yes, of course! You made him as you wished your dream—have I not known for long that your dream was my only rival? Listen, Silence! You must listen! These things occur to people sometimes. You must not disbelieve in what I tell you because it is outside your experience. I will tell you the story of Miss Zane, and what must have happened to you. She was born in this old tumble-down house. All her people had been born there, for about as long a time as since my great-grandfather's father came from Calabria to Piedmont. It seems a long time to you Americans. The land grew infertile. Many of her people

were dead because of the Civil War, and because of too much intermarrying. So what were left went away. Her lover went, and wanted her to go. But she loved the worn-out land and the house better than to follow the future in a new part of the country, and she stayed here alone. And living all alone, all she thought of was the race that would die when she died. I do not know how women come to these things. I suppose she wished so for the son she would not have, that she finally built herself a son in her imaginings. . . . You have heard of *that* happening? . . ."

"Yes," Silence faltered. She could not believe Nicholas, yet.

"Yes. So much you will believe. You must believe the rest, or it may be very bad for your mind. . . . You were tired, and you too were wrapped in your memories of that past which has made this poor old woman what she is. You went down through the woods, and you, wrapped in your strong thoughts, met this old Miss Zane, who has sat thinking—creating about herself—a vision of her son that she wanted, strongly too, for many years. The mind of a longing woman is a very strong thing, because it is she, after all, who is the creator. Oh, believe me, my dearest! I saw you at the stile. I saw you fling your arms up in the empty air, as if you embraced. I saw you turn and run, though I did not hear the cry—I was too far. *There was no one there.*"

"There was no one there? . . ." Silence echoed, shrinking back against Nicholas. She felt suddenly

tired and weak, as if she had been under a fearful strain for hours. Then she cried out. "Oh, Nicholas! I saw him! We loved each other! Oh, you are telling me that I am mad! I saw him—I saw him!"

Then she stopped, staring through the dark at the old woman, who was huddled in her chair, with a shabby shawl about her shoulders, that the Portuguese had brought her when he had failed to make her come in. She had caught an echo in her own voice of the note in Miss Zane's.

"You saw him, certainly," Nicholas told her again patiently. "You were not mad. So my uncle saw his mother once, who was dying far away, and longed to see him. You saw her thought, and your thought, as you see a picture on a movie screen. It spoke as you and she would have had it speak. . . . Come away, beloved! You are too good, too strong, too intelligent, too loveworthy, to live in the barren past."

"But—I felt his love . . . he loved me—"

Nicholas laughed, for the first time in the anxious moments he had spent there.

"It was my love you felt. . . . Come, dear! You can do nothing here."

The old woman was rising to her feet feebly, of her own accord.

"I suppose I must go in," she said. "He will come soon. Stay and watch for him, my dear. Pietro is right, I'm too old for the night air. . . ."

As the tall old figure was framed in the lighted doorway, where Silence could see the busy, hurrying

form of Pietro's wife going this way and that, busy about the house, she saw, too, with a thrill half pity, half terror, that the house was weather-stained and crumbling. The shaft of light showed, too, that the roses she still held in her hand were blighted and awry with a generation of neglect, and that the yard was weed-grown. The palings, even, showed unpainted and with great gaps between. And where she had thought there was a smooth, gravelled walk, that too was almost obliterated with neglect. Her own skirt was torn as if it had been dragged through undergrowth. She turned to Nicholas, the only stable thing in a terrifying world, and he led her mutely down the steps, and in the direction where the cornfields had been. As he raised his hand, with the flashlight in it, to show them their path, she saw that the cornfields, too, had been a thing of glamour. It was all wild woodland. Nicholas held her more closely and understandingly as he helped her through the open stile.

He said nothing more until they were within sight of the camp. Then he bent down to her again.

"Those people of yours, they came to a new land because they were brave and strong and good. They did not stay in the old, because their fathers had lived there. Silence, this is a day when your country needs you as it never has before—needs you to be brave and strong and good, too, and to marry and have children who will carry on the fight against wrong beliefs, and wicked men and women who want

to wreck our country. You have said that you believe in me—I think you would have loved me before this, if it had not been for your dream-lover. Silence? . . ."

She looked up at his dark, regular-featured face, with its look of love and kindness, and thought of the other face—the one so like the portrait she loved. She was very tired, and very lonely. And she knew that all Nicholas had said was true.

"If you will be patient a little longer—" she faltered.

He laughed triumphantly.

"If you will give me so much I can hope the rest!" he told her gaily. "And now think of it no more, my dear. There is the light, and you must be very tired and hungry by now."

She would never escape from Nicholas' love now, and she knew it. She was content. She even smiled piteously up at him, resting gladly in his hold as he half led, half supported her up the porch of the camp house. But she held tight to the withered branch of clematis in her hand.

"But I thought," protested her uncle, "that you were safe in Maine with Phœbe and Andrew? Not to speak of . . . am I too rash in saying . . ."

"Not so long as you haven't said it," his niece Sydney answered, enveloping him in a masterful embrace which he took with evident pleasure, but a little rocking—Sydney was very strong.

He settled his glasses more tightly and looked at her as she released him. It was more or less the unspoken code of the family as a whole, through most of their connection clergyfolk trained never to be off guard, to laugh if there was any danger of feeling like crying. Sydney, her cheeks flushed through the French army tan that had never quite worn off, and her dark eyes unnaturally bright, laughed, and her uncle lifted his eyebrows.

"I see," he mused, rushing in where he alone could tread with Sydney, "that I *was* too rash.

"That name shall be silent
And silent his fame. . . ."

"I didn't mean to be tragic," said Sydney, rather ashamed of herself and her implied transgression of Uncle Andrew's belief that one's sense of humor should not die even in one's troubles. "But I've—

broken off with Frederick. And I do not *want* to talk about it. I want to stay with you, please, Uncle Andrew! I've sworn off the world."

"Even in this remote backwater, where by the large number of genuine Americans remaining you may see how far from modernism and progress we are," said Uncle Andrew, giving a hobby a furtive airing, "the world exists. Every one here, my dear niece, is wearing his or her flesh, though, as we have had a hot summer and a decree of fashion, rather less than of yore. I confess to still having a personal liking for curves in the female. And wherever the world and the flesh have a rendezvous, there, alas, is our old acquaintance the Devil. But to such peace as I have—and as you can get when your friends down here discover you—you are welcome, my dear. The touch of masterfulness which you acquired partly from Our Army in Flanders—I may say—and partly, I fear, in the natural reaction from a minister's home, combined with the touch of desire to change others for the better which we all, alas, possess in our clan. . . ."

"I wasn't in Flanders," said Sydney, quite herself by now, "and you're entirely lost in that sentence. But you're a duck to have me."

"That," said her uncle, "is a quotation. There is an article called "The Land of Lost Allusion," which I should like you to read, my dear, when you have unpacked. An intelligent little article, referring to the

fact that literary references are lost upon the rising generation."

But when she had run upstairs to unpack he stood still in the middle of the room, staring at the third volume of Boswell's Johnson, by a triumph over his housekeeper left at peace on the carpet three days now.

"Too bad," he said. "From what I heard of him, I liked Frederick. But perhaps . . ."

. . . . . .

Something up in New York City was annoying Malcolm Shore badly, and he could not imagine what it was. He had an excellent leather business, which was doing much better than, considering the times, it had any business to. It was pleasantly near time for him to take his usual train out to the attractive suburb where he lived with an equally attractive wife. She would meet him at the station in their very good car, with a selection of their three pride-worthy children on its back seat. There would even be time for a game of tennis or so at the club before dinner. The club was good. So would be his partner; and the dinner. There was no uncertainty about the whole excellent program, unless it might be the personnel of the children on the back seat. . . . And yet something bothered him. Something was irritating the back of his mind, nibbling, fretting.

Presently it focussed itself on two impossible rea-

sons; old Bill Gorman's wedding-cards and the big picture his secretary kept so accurately and so well dusted always on the same place on his desk. . . . He must get a new picture—it was absurd to have faced the same smile and the same evening frock on the same Marjorie for five years now. Besides the children were getting bigger. He must tell her to have a new one taken. . . . As for his classmate's marriage, why that added to the general feeling of the staleness of things he couldn't imagine. There had been an epidemic of marriages and engagements among his contemporaries lately; he had been enveloped in an atmosphere of true love. He himself had been married ten years; older men were apt to instance him complacently when they advocated early marriages. He had been twenty-three and Marjorie twenty-one.

Now, these ten years later, all was very well and prosperous with them, and with Junior, Barbara, Peter, Laddie the collie, the bungalow and the car. Marjorie had named the children according to the fancy for quaintness that had come in about their time. Malcolm always let her do the naming—little things like that were what made your wife happy. Marjorie and Malcolm were very happy together.

He shut the annoying photograph in a desk-drawer impatiently, shocking his neat, middle-aged secretary a little as she tiptoed by. She liked him, as most people did. And he "made no advances," she was wont to say. He wasn't that kind of a pup, he would have said himself if the matter had come up.

He was, indeed, a very decent and lovable fellow.

The feeling of annoyance—staleness—irritation—whatever it was—clung around him through subway and train. Even when he saw his car waiting at the station, Marjorie's little gloved hands on the wheel.

It was all exactly as he had known it would be, and yet it didn't lift his spirits. He had even remembered rightly on the way out that it would be Junior and Barbara on the back seat to-night, because they had hung up their coats for a week without being told, and Peter hadn't. Laddie waved a well-known sorrel tail and gave the well-known ecstatic welcome, and Marjorie's pretty waved brown head leaned out the sedan window with just the bright smile Marjorie always had when she welcomed him. It was all nice. It was very nice.

And yet the something jarred and fretted still. It wasn't nerves or overwork, because he asked the doctor, and the doctor laughed in his face.

"You're a perfect ox, old man," he was told. "Not a thing the matter with you. I'll go this far with you, though; you need a while out of harness. Drop your work for awhile, or if you can't do that, go take charge of another branch. Send your kids to a grandmother and you and Marjorie go off for a little honeymoon."

It sounded like a good idea, and he talked it over with Marjorie. But she couldn't manage it, so far as she was concerned.

"I've promised that paper on Masefield for the

Woman's Club. And there's the paper-hanger coming next week. The guest-room simply must be done over—you know we agreed on that—before Lucille Marcus comes on the visit she's planned. . . . Oh, I'd forgotten how near that was! There's only ten days between the decorator and her getting here. That wouldn't be worth while even if I got out of doing the paper on Masefield. And Junior has to be taken in with his teeth twice a week—"

It was plain there was no chance of untangling Marjorie from her routine. She was very sweet about it, and tried honestly to plan for an escape somewhere, but the threads would not untwist, and she could not bring herself to cutting them. Shore was for making a clean sweep of decorator, visitor and Masefield, and letting Junior's teeth stay unstraightened for a couple of weeks more. But it was no use. He suspected Marjorie of being a little afraid of the camping trip he had suggested. He had never been able to get her to go camping. She was a dainty little soul, uncomfortable unpowdered and unwaved and away from bathtubs; and she disliked leaving her children. But she was, as always, sweet about his going. If the doctor said he needed a change, why, he would doubtless get more of one alone. And perhaps things would straighten out later, and she could join him.

She was certainly a dear little thing—just the same dear little thing she had been ten years ago. On the train going to Delaware Malcolm smiled at the thought of her slim little white over-manicured hand waving

him good-by, with the handkerchief picked up in the exact middle, "like a steel-engraving," he had used to tease her in the days of their engagement. Just so she had used to wave him good-by the summer before they married. The same hand, the same gesture. . . .

He leaned back in his chair. The doctor had been right—it *was* a relief to slip everything off his shoulders for awhile. Down in Delaware there would be, beside the nearly negligible business he was looking after, he had heard, excellent shooting. His associate there was putting him up at the Country Club for the length of his stay. Sounded pretty good all around.

It was. He drove ahead with his business in a way which did not seem to brace up the overwork theory. He flung himself into the country club round with a zest he had scarcely known since his college days. He rose in the morning looking forward to the fun life was going to be; and enjoyed himself genially till two in the morning, usually, with unabated vigor. He said to himself that he wished Marjorie could have cut loose from all her fool things and come with him. He was honestly unaware that it was the dropping of all his responsibilities, those of a husband and father among the rest, which were making him feel so buoyant.

It was the third afternoon of his stay, and he had, for a wonder, a free moment. He had been reading one of Marjorie's nice little letters, with a funny scrawl inside from Peter. He had been smiling over it, taken back for the moment to the atmosphere of

his home, and wishing the little chap were with him. Then he thrust it in his pocket, and stared out into the road. And he made the rueful discovery that his old nibbling restlessness and vague want of something had only been lying in wait, patient till he should have a quiet moment. He wanted—he didn't know what he wanted. . . .

Certainly not to have an elderly man in a caped coat sit down on the window-seat beside him with a little chuckle of comfort, switch on a light which destroyed all the gloom so comfortable to grouse in, and begin to read aloud to him without a shadow of excuse.

"Here it is!" said the elderly gentleman with an innocent triumph. "The Eternal Return of Nietzsche, two hundred years before that poor soul ever learned his own mountainous language, in an English jest-book of the sixteenth century!"

He peered amiably at Malcolm over the edge of a pair of bifocal spectacles as he began to read. Malcolm did not know whether, by reason of blindness, the old gentleman took him for a bosom friend, or was merely electing him one. He wished he hadn't pounced on him. And yet one couldn't be rude to the old soul. He was so like, as he read earnestly on with comments of his own, something you'd read about and never expected to find. . . . Oh, well, the type doubtless did exist still in far-off country towns—the charming, discursive old-school manners that most people have no time for, the enormous, leisured, futile

scholarship—the whole atmosphere of a life spent far from the hot realities of the present, of anything that had happened later than the slow-going, amiable, petty eighties. . . .

As the old gentleman read and talked on, Malcolm began to feel that he had known him for at least ten years. He began to remember his dead father. Yet his bluff, gay father hadn't been at all like this gentle old soul with his half-winning, half-amusing air of constitutional helplessness. Midway in his discourse on Nietzsche he introduced himself, in a half whimsical parenthesis, as the rector of the little church of the place—

"Andrew Blanton by name, very much at your service, sir."

So he was elected, not mistaken, for a friend. Dr. Blanton, he discovered as time went on, was given to doing that to most of the world. He took it for granted, as a child does, that people were quite as interested in him and his tags of scholarship, as he was in them and whatever they did, and he was somehow rarely disappointed. It was a comforting glamour that the old man cast about him. Malcolm sank into it restfully.

He found himself being led away in the direction of the book-lined rectory to a running dissertation on English humor, quite as a matter of course. The man who had put Malcolm up at the club encountered them at the doorstep, and seemed quite to understand the procedure.

"I didn't suppose he would escape you long, Uncle Andrew," he said with a mock-mournfulness and a very apparent affection.

"Only going home with me for a little while," said Uncle Andrew, looking a little guilty and dropping his spectacle-case, which his friend retrieved for him in an accustomed manner. He dropped it into a capacious black bag with a draw-string, dropped the bag itself, had it restored, and finally achieved his home without more than three following mislayings of property.

He established Malcolm in an eaved bedroom, of which not the least charm was that the books lining it quite overflowed on the light-stand and nearly on the bed. Then he wandered off, and could be heard being lovingly reproved by a rich female darky voice in the distance.

Malcolm laughed to himself. It was all so relaxing, somehow. He strayed downstairs presently, reading with avid interest as he went an elderly green book on the crimes of the Mormons, and sat himself on a verandah he found to await Dr. Blanton's remembering him again. There was no hurry.

Nearly an hour went by before anything else happened. Then the screen-door made a noise, and when he looked up a tall girl was walking out of the house with a pair of tennis shoes in her hand. She sat down on the steps, quite unembarrassed by her unshod feet and a braid of thick dark hair over her shoulders, and began to lace on the shoes.

"I'm Sydney Anthony. Dr. Blanton's my uncle," she told him with her uncle's immediate friendliness. She was not exactly pretty, measured by the standard of Marjorie's carefully groomed prettiness. Her amused scarlet mouth was too large, and her dark eyes —large too—had a tilt down at the corners that was fascinating, but irregular. Her white skirt and middy made her look younger than he afterward learned she was; not more than seventeen or eighteen. Her voice, in contrast to her carelessly intimate manner, was very soft and caressing, with a light note of mockery in it. "Are you the Mr. Shore he's taken admiringly to his breast? Thought you were quite staid and old —he said, before he left to visit the afflicted, that you had a genuine talent for the appreciation of sixteenth century humor."

She went on with her shoes, doubled lithely over her task.

"I hope he's taken me to his breast," said Malcolm, laughing a little, "but I can't swear to the rest."

They both laughed again. There was a wind of something that came with her which seemed to blow away the vague boredom and impatience he had felt so long. He felt suddenly freed, comfortable, as if a dryad had stepped casually out of her tree and begun a conversation.

"Then he expects you to stay the night. In fact, I don't think you'll get back to the club again for some time."

Malcolm protested politely, though in his heart he

hoped what she said was true. He fitted here, somehow.

"Oh yes, you will. People generally do what Uncle Andrew wants them to." She straightened up from lacing her shoes and leaned back against a pillar. "I'm going to play tennis; that's why I'm wandering about in pigtails. That is, I am when Uncle Andrew gets back from Mary Murray's rheumatism. Till then, being a lady on my uncle's gallery, I entertain you. . . . I'm sure 'entertain' was the word."

Somehow her mockery freed him still further. "'Entertain' is the word. I hope you realize your duty."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I always seem to have to do my duty when I'm around Uncle Andrew. He's of an insidious virtue. Otherwise I seldom do, I hope."

"If you cut out the tennis and went motoring with me instead would it be doing your duty or avoiding it?" he demanded on an impulse. It was so long since he'd had impulses that he liked having one. Of course she wouldn't do it. Women and their network of unbreakable little plans!

She looked up, her white teeth flashing.

"Avoiding it—delightfully! It's just the hour for a drive, and I can tennis every day. Wait. I'll call up Josephine-Lou, and be with you toot sweet."

She leaped up, this friendly stranger, and dove into the house like a boy. He could hear her at the telephone. By the time he had gone to the garage and

come back with his car, she was ready. He tooted for her boyishly, and she ran immediately out, a white tam pulled down over her ears and a jumper instead of a middy over her white silk skirt. She tossed a sweater into the car deftly, and came down the steps lighting her cigarette.

"Very fast—and very far!" she demanded. "It will feel much more like a dereliction of duty if you go fast. But we'll combine virtue with pleasure. I happen to know that Uncle Andrew wants some autumn leaves for the chancel."

"Very well. They can grow quite a distance off, can't they?"

"They do," she informed him, her teeth flashing again. She gave him a lighted cigarette, as his hands were busy with the wheel, lighting herself another, without being asked. Something in the matter-of-courseness of the act suggested to him that she had been overseas, and he asked her. She nodded.

"Yes, a year and a half," she said. "Entertainer, though, not brow-smoother. I sang for them. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. It was a decent life—heaps of hard work, and no problems to worry over." Her brow knotted for a moment. He smiled secretly. A kid like that with problems on her mind! . . . She couldn't be so much of a kid, though, if they let her go over with the Y.

"You get over?" she asked in turn, before he could wonder further.

He shook his head.

"Wife and three children," he explained, glad it could be slipped in so easily, "and worse than that, the government decided that I was an expert on leather. I spent a glorious and warlike year inspecting saddles."

She smiled, and said what a chum would have said. "Hard luck!"

He hadn't cared so much for these overseas girls, as he'd run into them time and again. He said, as most men did, that the life had rubbed off something —made them arrogant, sexless. But this friendly, poised young creature, with her man-to-man attitude, and the girl's piquancy under the comradely understanding—well, he liked her a lot, just as he would have liked an instantly sympathetic man-friend. You didn't have to talk across to her as you did usually to women—pick your ideas. He wasn't man to her; he was a human being and a friend. He settled into the situation with the feeling of relaxation and comfort one's body feels in a comfortable chair.

Uncle Andrew had remembered him by the time they were back from their drive with a carful of yellow and scarlet leaves. And Sydney was quite right. He would not hear of any such thing as Shore's return to the Country Club. He despatched a lurking suitor of the black cook's for Shore's belongings, rode down his faint objections amiably, and launched on something which he evidently considered of more importance than any possible objections—Shore seemed to remember faintly afterwards that it was John Milton's

attitude to political economy. They sat out on the verandah afterward, the three of them, belonging most intimately, and talking about unimportant things that were very interesting. Sydney and Malcolm Shore did more of the talking after dinner. Uncle Andrew had a way of diving in for references in books, that somehow did not break the thread of things at all.

Malcolm Shore found himself talking, that first evening, a good deal about Marjorie and the children. He didn't exactly want to do it, either. Something seemed to be driving him to. He realized afterwards that he had been doing it to make himself feel decent. If Sydney liked him in spite of his having a wife he lived happily with, he was playing fair, and could go on with this new wonderful friendship. For Sydney, though she happened to be a woman, was the friend he had, without knowing it, been lonely for a long time, he knew. She had things for him that no one else had ever been able to give. He had for her, too, it seemed. Their minds sprang together and their cheeks flushed with the excitement of this immediate kinship, as he remembered his mind had sprung to meet the minds of one or two of his mates in college days. It would be a lifelong friendship, perhaps. Marjorie would like her as much as he did, surely. She made friends more easily than he did, anyway.

They carried Uncle Andrew off for a long drive next day, ignoring his protests about parish duties. Sydney had not been staying with him long, it appeared, and on the strength of her being an infrequent guest de-

manded his society. Her brother was a clergyman also, (it seemed the profession ran in the family) and he had married the daughter of a rich New Yorker, who owned something he called a camp, but which was more like a country estate in the Canadian woods. Sydney had been staying up there with her brother and sister-in-law and some other guests of theirs, till, as she explained, the luxury, together with one or two other things, got on her nerves.

"It's all very well for Phœbe and Andrew," she said, "they work like dogs when they're in the city, and if they want to rough it on flowery beds of ease it's only sensible. They don't take time for much of that sort of thing at home. But I don't live in the slums, and when I camp I want to *camp,* and come back with rapture to a porcelain bathtub. But—well, I suppose I wouldn't have stayed even if that particular camp had been as primitive as Davy Crockett's."

Her eyes darkened, and for a moment her face looked drawn and tired. Then it lighted again with her accustomed careless gaiety, and she began asking Malcolm ridiculous riddles about Mary Christmas and Benny Dictine.

She loved the woods as much as Malcolm did. She was back again on the subject at their next dinner-table conversation. She knew a camp where things were primitive enough to suit her, and yet not uncomfortable, she said, and she was planning to go up there alone in another two days.

"I was going to take Uncle Andrew along, but he

was hard enough to detach from his sick people anyhow, and now—I verily believe he's added you to the menage for an alibi," she said teasingly. "It will only defer your doom, let me tell you, Uncle Andrew."

But Uncle Andrew said cheerfully, "Now, my dear Sydney, you are putting the old man in a very embarrassing position. Mr. Shore will presently feel that I am about to put him forth in—let us say—a hypothetical snowdrift. On the contrary, I am not so far crushed by your tyrannies as to have to resort to alibis. If I wished to go with you, which I do not, I would suggest to Mr. Shore, who has told me that he has been recommended a change, that he make a third of our party!"

He ended with his little high laugh on a note of childlike triumph. And Sydney got up and ran around to him, and kissed him exactly as she would have kissed a child.

"Why, you lamb, of course you would," she said. "He should take anybody along he wanted to, so he should, except a smallpox patient, maybe."

Uncle Andrew looked embarrassed, the fact being that he *had* spent three indomitable weeks last summer isolated with a colored family whose unreasonable dread of hospitals had been too much for his heart. But he didn't like it mentioned.

Malcolm made a bold stroke. Afterwards he wondered how he had the courage, but at the moment it seemed to him that he wanted to go on living with these two delightful people so much that he must do it.

"Let's all go, then!" he said boyishly. "Come on, Uncle Andrew— I beg your pardon, Doctor Blanton, but it seemed so natural." Dr. Blanton beamed. "Always Uncle Andrew to my friends, my dear boy," he said. "But—"

"But now your last link's broken," said his niece firmly. "Us for the woods."

It all seemed very impromptu and wild, when Malcolm came to think of it afterwards. But it was actually decided, Uncle Andrew struggling feebly, for he hated making starts, though he always enjoyed himself after he had been shoved into starting.

"You're really doing me a favor," Malcolm told him persuasively. "I wanted to go badly, and I hadn't the nerve to do it alone. I've been horribly restless and nervous lately, worrying my wife's life out of her, I expect."

"I think," said Uncle Andrew, gazing at him over his thick spectacle with a steady mildness, "that the trip will be the best thing in the world for you."

The unworldliness struck Malcolm later. Not many old gentlemen would have encouraged a young married man to go on a trip with him and a handsome young niece, he thought. Of course he was safe, but lots of men wouldn't have been. Not with that wonder of a Sydney. What a brain she had, and what womanliness! Underneath the careless, almost scornful way she had of facing facts, almost flinging them at you if you like, you could feel something strong vibrating. . . . Passion and intelligence, and tenderness—

look at her half-laughing devotion to the old uncle, who must be something of a trial sometimes with his half-consciously whimsical absent-mindedness—and strength and looks to boot. Queer she hadn't married. Men liked her enough; there were sufficient of them haunting her footsteps even down here, he had seen already. They weren't the sort of men she ought to marry, though. But there wasn't much danger of her throwing herself away on them. She was patently untouched by any of them. . . . He was not jealous—he had no right to be. Still it was an added pleasure when the three of them were finally on their journey together.

"It isn't often one finds two friends—not just acquaintances, but actual friends—in one house," he told her musingly, from where he sat facing her in the canoe that bore them on the final stage of their trip. "They're rare, you'll know when you get to be my age—people you can be your real self to without stopping to think."

"Without making yourself over for the moment, or holding parts of you back so you'll adjust decently to the other person. I know," she said, her erect head and shoulders vivid even beside the scarlet sunset and deep, serene blue water they were silhouetted against. "I've had—let's see—just two since I left college. You're the third."

"College?" He had not thought her so old.

"Yes. I'm twenty-seven." She was always contrasting with Marjorie; not to either woman's disad-

vantage; only with a sense of the curious differences in women. Marjorie always hid her age as if it was a disgrace. Sydney passed that as unimportant, to come back to the fact of their friendship, smiling a little in the red light. "And you don't know how glad I was to find you all waiting for me! Yes, we really *are* friends. If we were both girls or both men it would be just the same. And do you know, I did need you. I've been through something—well, a bit hard—just lately."

She was the most divinely honest creature—and how she *knew!*

"I needed you too," he said, "just that way. A friend like you, man or woman."

They landed then, and he helped her ashore, giving and receiving a warm handclasp that went through him in a strong current of courage and pride and delight. . . . Uncle Andrew, clinging to the cape-coat which no representations as to the superiority of sweaters had been able to tear him from, got stiffly from the other canoe and stood a moment, staring out over the great sweep of tranquil water to the blue stately hills far beyond.

"Oh, ye mountains and hills, bless ye the Lord; praise Him and magnify Him forever!" he murmured, his thin old peering face lighted for an instant with a radiance which made Malcolm regard him curiously. He heard Claude-Camille, the hairiest of the big guides, say something in French to 'Tiste, the other one.

"C'est la bonne chance; c'est un homme saint," was what he thought it was. Shore had not thought of kind old unpractical Uncle Andrew as particularly holy. But he did seem to bring good luck; at least, his presence greased the wheels as it always did. Unusual care always seemed to surround the old gentleman from whatever quarter. He was beside the younger people in a moment, making a leisured quotation from Horace about simplicity, capped by an amiably scornful remark about the factitious simplicity of camp life with two guides to wait on one. Whereat Sydney hugged him irrelevantly and flashed down the path, like a slim boy in her sweater and knickerbockers, in pursuit of some wood-thing she thought she saw. When Shore laughed at her for the vanity of her chase she snatched his cap and was off again, he after her. They were like two happy, wild children.

It was Arcady and Arden, with, by grace of Uncle Andrew, a touch of the Groves of Academe. Life went with the tingling exhilaration it always has in the Northern woods in the Fall. Living had never been so complete, so effortless, so delightful. Sydney was merely like a good pal sometimes; there were other times when she was like a little girl, and Malcolm found himself giving her the amused tenderness he had for his own small Barbara. Sometimes she was an elusive, very wise and thrilling woman. Always he wanted to be where she was, always to learn more about her, though she had a frankness he had never known a woman could dare have, and seemed to pour

herself out to him as willingly and constantly as he did to her.

In the evenings they sat by the camp-fire with Uncle Andrew, in that content, relaxed intimacy which only camp-fires can give in perfection. And still Malcolm thought it was only comradeship. Until there came a night when 'Tiste claimed calmly as a right—and Uncle Andrew accepted it the same way—the old man's ministry to a sick woman down the lake, and the two guides paddled him down.

Malcolm and Sydney were left alone in the tingling, pungent-scented evening, the dusk and the great silent woods and the great fire their only companions. They talked on for awhile, and gradually ceased talking, in a measureless content. Presently Sydney sprang up to put more wood on the dying fire. It was one of her boyish ways never to ask men to do such things. As she bent across Malcolm her long thick braid, fragrant of the sweet wood smoke and of pine, brushed his face.

He reached up and caught her wrist as the wood fell on the fire. Suddenly flame ran from her hand to his; they were in each other's arms without knowing how they had done it. They held each other tight, kissed passionately. It was supremely right, supremely wonderful. She was everything Malcolm Shore had need unknowingly for years. She was understanding and fulfilment. . . . Presently they drew a little from each other, and sat on hand-in-hand, talking in low,

half-laughing voices about the wonderfulness of the thing. It was one of those high and magical hours which come only once or twice in a lifetime. They parted finally with a last close, certain embrace which seemed already one of those things which had always been and would always be.

They greeted each other with the same certainty when they met next morning, and walked frankly down one of the wood-trails together, to sit in a little green-dappled clearing, walled close by pines, and talk of the thing as it was, unafraid.

Sydney faced the thing as he put it to her with her divine bravery. He tried to give her honesty. He tried to be just to Marjorie, still with the old double consciousness that it was something that would have jarred on him somehow in another man. He was intent on clearing his soul. And Sydney accepted what he said with her comradeship and honesty, just as he gave it. Or so it seemed.

"But isn't it right I should give up the lesser for the greater, Sydney?" he said. "I gave Marjorie something I can never give another woman, perhaps. I want to acknowledge that. We must face it without pettiness. But you and I have something to give each other that we could give no one else. It's the great thing—the lifetime thing."

She flung back her head, to look into his eyes as they stood breast to breast.

"Mind and soul and body—" she said. It seems

real to me—the most real thing I ever knew. . . . Oh, Malcolm, are you sure? We mustn't hurt that poor woman unless it's worth it."

"Do you suppose I'd shake the very bases of my life if it weren't worth it—or ask you to, you, the most wonderful and perfect thing God ever gave me? Isn't it worth it?"

She dropped her little proud head on his shoulder with a shudder that was nearly a sob.

"It's a big tide sweeping us away—the biggest tide that ever rose. We'll be brave—we'll go through the necessary things, I suppose because of the bigness of our belonging together. It's the great thing."

"The great thing—the lifetime thing," he said again, and they were silent.

They came down the little wood-path into the clearing around the tents, as they had gone, openly hand-in-hand. Sydney smiled into his eyes and went on with her buoyant step to find one of the guides for something. Malcolm turned toward his own tent, to find that Andrew Blanton stood facing him in the entrance, his kind old peering face hurt and perplexed. Malcolm faced him quietly, even proudly. The exaltation still held him.

"Let's talk about it," said Uncle Andrew gently.

They sat down on the camp-stools by the tent door.

"There isn't much to say," Malcolm said steadily. "We love each other, and we're going to be honest about it."

"You have a wife and children," Uncle Andrew said, his face still wistful and hurt.

"Yes, and I love them. I'll always love Marjorie in a way. But I've outgrown her. I know now that I went away from her because the tie between us was beginning to be impossible. It would be worse for her to go on being married to me, feeling my weariness of her, than for us to have a clean break. She's pretty and sweet, she'll marry again. But Sydney and I—well, we're mates."

"How do you know you're Sydney's mate? How do you know you're not, fundamentally, of your own wife's ideals and viewpoints?"

Malcolm shook his head, smiling. The proposition was so absurd.

"I don't know," said Uncle Andrew sharply, "that anything can have turned you into a man of Sydney's generation. My impression is that you're no exception to the rule that there's fifty years between all the rest of us and these young people of the war. You don't seem to me in the least like Sydney's mates as I've run across them, outrageous young imps that they are! My experience of your kind, which is long if not wide, gives me the impression that you are simply passing through the moment of revolt which comes once to every married man."

The peering whimsical old face had changed all in a moment. Why had he never seen, till now, behind that mask, the stern wisdom of an unafraid shepherd of souls? For it had always been there. The dim

old eyes pierced down deep into him. He sat silent as the old man went dominatingly on.

"Once to every married man," he repeated. "I have never known one it didn't come to, harder or lighter. Some never admit it to themselves. Some get it lightly—little flirtations. Some get it hard. Harder than it deserves. . . . Oh, I know, boy—don't you suppose I'm a man myself? You've seen the men your age footloose to mate, all around you—" (How had he known about Bill Gorman's cards, and Arthur Watson's engagement, and . . .) "You've been wild to run with the herd, and the natural instinct of the male to wander has helped you. And on top of it you've found one of the women you would have married if you'd been free. . . . Oh, it's natural: as natural as murder. It's instinct. We all want to murder people at times, but we don't do it. If you hold hard it will pass."

"It isn't instinct," Malcolm countered furiously. "It's my mind, my soul, all the better part of me. The physical thing's there, but it's secondary."

"Your instincts are lying things," said Andrew Blanton. "They can always make the mind, which is much younger than they and pitifully trusting, believe anything. There's one chance in a hundred that this thing between you and Sydney is the great real thing. There are ninety-nine that your moment of revolt has merely found you close to one of the half-dozen women you could genuinely love. But you took your road ten years ago. It's a coward's way to strike down another

one, because it seems easier. If you take your side-road with Sydney, you may be forming a habit of striking down all the other cross-roads you are bound to come to from time to time. You may get into the habit of doing it every ten years, or perhaps only every five—or two. I've seen that happen. What you plan to do is to lie down on your job. In your heart your wife comes first. Go back to her."

He turned and walked away, leaving Malcolm feeling as if a storm had swept him, so great was the power and personality which had been loosed on him from this old man he had loved, to be sure, but loved amusedly, as one would a child. The thunder of the words still vibrated in him. . . . It was not true. It was none of it true. Things were still what they had been. He walked in the direction Sydney had taken, to get back the high exaltation of their mood together. . . . But Sydney had gone off on the water, or somewhere else, and he was faced instead by Claude-Camille, who spoke immediately in his very bad and incongruous Maine English.

"Ain't no letter. Nobody got none but *M. le curé*. You was lookin' for some, wasn't you?"

He had been expecting, with a little shiver of distaste, another of Marjorie's conscientiously-mailed little letters, with its inevitable catalogue of furnace-men and tennis-games and children's small brilliancies. It was exactly time, counting the two days and the canoe-trip, to bring mail. But she hadn't written. . . . The little thrill of relief he expected did not come. He

felt lost, somehow. And suddenly he was faced by the fact that up till now he had unconsciously, while loving Sydney, as he thought, with everything in him, been still having a life constructed with Marjorie for a base. Could it be that the affection for her was so a part of him that he didn't know it to be there? . . . That was foolish. The old man had said what old men have to say, indeed, he had been more kind and unconventional than most in his place would have been. He had shaken him. . . . He and Sydney had faced the great step now; and if he did not feel a wrench at the idea of giving up the wife he had lived with for ten years he would be a brute indeed. But what he had said to Sydney was true—must be true. Their love was the great thing, the thing that counted, that was worth breaking things for. . . . He wished she would come back to him, so that in her warm, brave presence the chilling thoughts, the ridiculous little unhappiness because Marjorie hadn't written—Marjorie, who wrote like clockwork!—would slip from him. He went off through the woods alone, hoping to come across her. But though he searched all the places where they two had played together, he could not find her. He had brought lunch along, and when noon found him too far from camp to make it, he ate it where he was, and went on hunting, as one hunts sometimes in a desolate dream, for Sydney. When he found her about five, and they clung in each other's arms, it was a heavenly wakening. They went back down the narrow trail in the old way, stopping some-

times to laugh or tease or kiss. . . . and yet something was different—something was strange. Sydney seemed different. He knew it was his imagination, that the difference lay in himself, but he could not stop feeling that it was in Sydney.

There were two days more of this troubled rapture. Uncle Andrew was his old gentle, whimsical self. He said nothing more; you would have thought it a wild dream that he had ever said anything, to hear him relating at relishing length a quite preposterous legend about a trout and a saint named Audaldus, or quoting Isaak Walton verbatim from his unbelievable memory. The third day Sydney called Malcolm Shore to come with her, in a way that he knew he did not imagine was strange.

"I can't go on keeping still any longer," she said. "I want to talk to you about—things."

"I thought we'd done all the talking there was, darling," he said.

She shook her head and beckoned him to their trysting-nook with the pine walls. She put up a guarding hand as he bent to take her in his arms.

"No. If you touch me I can't say what I want to—it's hard enough, just with you near me. . . . You are so dear."

Her voice was scarcely audible. He stood from her, the vague feeling of something wrong taking visible black shape in his mind.

"There are things to say to you—to tell you. You told me about your wife. I didn't tell you that before

I came down here I'd just broken my engagement, nor why."

She stood against a great pine, her hands clutched behind her on it as if it gave her strength, a slim Rosalind-like figure. She was very white under her brown.

"I—loved him . . . terribly. He'd done something unforgivable, I thought. We'd been apart a long time —he had to be off on business. And when he came back, when it seemed I'd never loved him so much before, some devil came and said he'd kissed another girl. I asked him, and he said yes. He said there was no excuse for it, but he wasn't going to be anything but honest with me. We'd started on that basis. He said all the usual things about its never happening again. He said he'd thought I'd understand, that I wasn't the usual kind of woman who couldn't. He had been dishonest in his bargain, and he wanted me to know it. He said that some day the tides might get me, and I'd understand. He'd thought I'd understand, maybe, anyway . . . I didn't. I was just the usual old-fashioned angel-cat female with a hurt pride. I smashed things, and came to Uncle Andrew's. . . . I've been thinking these last three days, and I think I understand now. The tides have caught you and me, too. And all things as they are, I believe I must go back to my lover. Because I can understand now, I think. He said that after this he'd be strong against the currents, if there were any. I didn't know what he meant then. I do now. I must go back, and we

must go on playing fair, and keeping each other out of the tides' way. I think we can put it through. I think that's the sporting way. This—isn't."

He stood staring at her numbly.

"But I thought you loved me," he said tonelessly.

Her hands clutched the tree harder. "You said a man could love two women at once. I suppose it must be possible to love two men. I have the love. It flows to you now. If I go back, I think he will come first again. I think there's just—love. Oh, it's hard, it's horribly hard! But I believe this thing came to me so I could understand, and go back to him. I think I must. It's the straight way for you and me."

He cried out jealously, catching her in his arms with a rough strength; "You do love me, Sydney! There couldn't have been all this wonderful thing between us if you didn't care."

He felt her arms tighten about him, and her head dropped helplessly on his shoulder. "Don't hold me! If you do I will want to stay too much. Be merciful, Malcolm!"

His hold slackened for a moment automatically at her words, and she pulled herself from him, and ran down the path. He began to follow; but she was among the men busied near the tents before he could reach her. He paused at the wood's edge, and turned back to the little hallowed place inside the thick pines, and dropped down on their log to face it all. It was not hopeless yet. He could have her if he would fight

her for herself, and he would fight. . . . Then suddenly he saw that he could not. Half his forces were on her side the field. He felt helpless, inert. Passion, mental oneness, the sense of youth renewed; they were with him in his fight. But against them—

Once to every married man— . . . and if you fought it out you came through better than you started. And if you mistook this sudden upleaping of Spring in you for something worth smashing the whole fabric of your life and other lives for—all your decencies, your faith, your habitudes and plans and beliefs—you were taking a doubtful cross-road instead of going straight on to the goal. You were lying down on your job. . . . Sydney—Sydney! . . .

He went through hours of agony, there in the green place where he and Sydney had loved each other so. But in the end, when he lifted his face at a light touch on his shoulder, he was at peace.

"I came to find you, son. Some of your mail got mixed with mine—"

He looked up into the kind, absent old face.

"You were right," he said. "It was the moment of revolt. I almost know it now; or if I don't, I shall soon. . . . Uncle Andrew, ought I to tell Marjorie?"

Uncle Andrew put a thin old arm around him. It was not a strong arm, but it felt somehow as his father's had once long ago when he was a frightened little boy.

"I wouldn't, son," said Uncle Andrew. "It isn't as if you and she were of this new generation, who can

fling those things at each other without being scarred for life. You mustn't hurt her. . . . And beside, you'd have to confess two people's sins beside your own. Be merciful to the old man. I hadn't any business to lure you up here, so you'd get the thing out of your system under my own interfering old paw. But I'd seen as fine lads as you go on the rocks because nobody interfered. . . . Don't tell your wife on me."

There was a half-humorous, half apologetic smile on his kind old face. But deeper than that was a light of fatherhood and loving yearning so real, so selfless, that Malcolm found he could not answer because of a tightening in his throat. He only dropped his head for an instant against the shabby old cape-overcoat, as if he had been in reality the little frightened, naughty lad of long ago, found and brought home. . . .

The two canoes parted. Malcolm turned his head to watch the other out of sight, in the sunset light that glinted on Uncle Andrew's spectacles and Sydney's warm dark hair. They were going to her brother's camp, where her lover was. He could not be sorry that he had come this close to wonderful, vivid Sydney. And yet her ruthlessness, her attitude of understanding and forgiving because she had herself gone through what her lover had, her little charming arrogances and scornfulnesses—would they, after all, have been an air he could live in? He recalled, with a sense of remembered warmth and comfort, the little affectionate, conscientiously detailed letter Uncle Andrew had

brought him. It was like Marjorie. Just the funny little phrases she always used. And a snapshot of herself and the children, on the lawn, she absurdly young and dainty to be the mother of three of them. . . . Babs was getting to look like her—well, she couldn't do better . . . Lord, it was going to be good to get back to it all again! . . . And it came to him all in a great warm wave how well things were with him. These men and girls still struggling with Romance—they were still fighting through their stormy seas toward the hope of—what he had. He was out beyond the breakers.

He turned his head once more. Only the flash of water on a paddle, and a flutter of the old cape-coat could be seen, so far apart they had gone.

"Going home," said Malcolm Shore to himself contentedly under his breath.

"NOBLESSE OBLIGE"

Dane Lee Tolliver met the two Polokoffs nearly at the same time. Of course, a part of the shock of the whole thing was because he did not know they were brother and sister. It was just one of those queer little twists which make so much difference.

When nice, romantic, public-spirited Aunt Emily told him enthusiastic tales of the wonderful little Pole who supported herself and her mother, wrote articles for social service magazines and practically controlled the immigrant population which, now there was a factory, flooded the lower end of the pleasant old town where his aunt lived, Dane was not thrilled. He rather visualized the sort of bobbed hair which goes with bone glasses, and a tense personality which would hurl tracts on economics on all who passed. But Aunt Emily, wily as well as public-spirited, was determined that no visitor should escape being shown her pet, and when she drew Dane apologetically into a harmless looking lace-shop it was Elsa Polokoff's lace shop.

He did not realize in the least, then, that this Elsa was that Elsa. She was more Scotch than foreign-looking; a clear-cut little freckled face with big velvety brown eyes and a childlike intentness of expression. Only her full red lips, and a touch of accent

which added to her swift winningness, betrayed that she was an outlander, not Scotch after all. Her personality was vivid and appealing at once, from her curly brown hair to the small brown hand that showed the laces, and when she laughed you could not realize that she had ever written an article in her life. Dane, who had let himself be dragged in Aunt Emily's train on many an earnest-minded errand, found himself suddenly excited about life, and very glad he was in the same room with Elsa. He had the American business man's infinite affectionate tolerance for his womenfolk; he was the more indulgent to Aunt Emily's ways because she and his sister were all there was left of that branch of the family. It had been an exceedingly good family, too; singers, statesmen, and even philanthropists to burn. And the terrific *noblesse oblige* of a certain type of old American ran resistlessly in their veins, one and all, though Aunt Emily had perhaps more than her share. As Verena, the irreverent flapper sister, put it, Aunt Emily simply ate up the downtrodden.

Elsa did not seem to come under that listing. Indeed, she was so warmly feminine that you thought of that, it seemed, to the exclusion of everything else. Aunt Emily and she, it appeared were doing something connected with gymnasiums, in the foreign end of town. . . . Why, she ought to have been motoring and dancing, instead of making earnest plans like that, and selling lace to take care of herself and the bundle-

wrapped old mother of whom he caught a glimpse as they passed out. She was so gay and so young-seeming; though she was twenty-seven, Aunt Emily said.

It seemed to him after they had gone that they had talked together for a long time, though all he could remember was one swift sentence, passionate earnest in between her flashing gaiety, about starving people in Poland. She seemed with him, after they had gone, as vividly as she had been in the flesh.

"Miss Polokoff stays with one, somehow, doesn't she?" said Aunt Emily as they got home, echoing his thoughts so exactly that it didn't seem like Aunt Emily, who usually moved in a cloud of her own. "She is wonderful, really . . . these new Americans have so much to give us. . . ."

He hadn't the heart to pin her down to any analysis of the hackneyed phrase, because she was staying with him too, Elsa. He let Aunt Emily dilate on her and her clan, which it appeared was filling up the old American suburb, and overflowing thickly—as he knew, indeed,—into Dorrance. And he stayed home when Elsa was due to come see Aunt Emily a night or so later. It was late, for she kept her shop open all hours, and seemed to do other things besides, having an apparent overcapacity for work. He watched her as she talked. Very different from either the conventionally gay women he knew near his own age, or the almost as conventionally audacious flappers his sister brought about the house in the holidays; very ardent,

very controlled, frank about things he would never think of speaking of, as silent about things he did; intensely different and with a personality like a flame. He had arranged with her, almost before he knew it, to come down to her place a couple of nights a week and show her about book-keeping.

When she had gone—she would not let him bring her home—and the spell of her lifted, he was a little surprised at what he had arranged so swiftly, but not sorry. He wanted to see more of her. She seemed, indeed, as if she had "so much to give," not only to her new country, but to every one. Even the shuffling old mother, wrapped in her inevitable shawl, brightened a little as she patted her daughter's trim shoulder with one grimy old hand. Dane looked at her with what he had hoped was concealed repulsion, as he sat by Elsa at the table behind the little shop.

"You do not like her?" said Elsa swiftly, but without anger. "Tell me. I want to have her better; I want to have myself better." She evidently spoke sincerely, so Dane, who was a fairly blunt person, answered her frankly.

"It's hard for them to change when they're as old as that. But I think you should get her to wash her hands more. Of course, the dust—"

"It's not dust," said Elsa, and laughed.

"Well, I suppose the American idea of the daily bath would seem a good deal," said Dane, beginning to feel like a tactful Americanizer.

"The daily bath," said Elsa, looking thoughtful.

Then she laughed again. "I don't know. I think I can do something."

Her own little brown hands were beautifully manicured. How on earth had she managed to do so much for herself? . . . They went on with the books, and Dane's smooth fair head and Elsa's little brown one bent close together, and they were all the better friends for the sudden excursion into improvements for Mrs. Polokoff.

It was not till the day before he went back—if you could call a drive of ten miles going back—that he realized how closely he had been drawn to Elsa. Nothing keeps a man from a woman so much as the sense of her efficiency—which is an inference that she can do without him—and Elsa was patently efficient. But when he came down to give her her final lesson, earlier than usual, because he wanted more time with her, quite frankly, he did not find her waiting for him at the door of her shop; and when he made adventurous way into the little neat inner room, she was in a dark corner, crying.

"So tired—so tired," she said, like a desolate child, her little accent stronger than usual, in her relaxation to grief. Dane was not of the men who are dismayed and annoyed by tears. He was rather a poised and thoughtful man, who took things at their evident value; and Elsa was not of the weeping kind. As she sat curled helplessly in her chair, all her capacities had slipped off like a cloak, and she was just a little tired helpless thing, who had carried too much of a

burden too bravely; all his protectiveness went out to her. Just a child, after all, to his thirty-four years, in spite of her courage. . . .

He soothed her, and she pulled herself together bravely, but they were closer after that, because when you've quieted a little sobbing thing, and made her feel that after all life isn't so hard, and she has clung to your hand and you to hers, somehow something has happened. When he went, her brown eyes clung to his blue ones, and their hands held fast again. The wistfulness and straightness and bravery of her went with him all down the street.

If he married Elsa—for the thought went with him too—there would be no opposition from his family, such as there was of it. As has been said, they had always been knights-errant, male and female. They would love her all the more for her past sorrows, and her brave fight upward, and the little adorable accent. As for his friends, they too would accept it as a natural doing of the Lee Tollivers. Their errantry was chartered, so to speak, like that of the libertines one has always heard about. They had of tradition a sort of license to rescue. When his great grandfather had liberated his slaves in 1850, it had only been considered a Lee Tolliver sort of thing; when his grand-uncle had endowed Dorrance University with a half-million and only left his family the other half, the family had accepted the Lee-Tolliverness of it calmly, along with a perpetual seat on the Board of Governors, and so, minus the seat, had the surrounding countryside. . . .

He was coming back to see her soon, he had told Elsa. He drove back to Aunt Emily's for his final night with her, a little warm feeling of fitting into the world in general and of perfect adjustment to Elsa in particular, thrilling him all over.

Naturally, when he was back in Dorrance he found that things had piled up in his absence. A hard day with his stenographer cleared off his arrears of letters; two more pulled things back into pre-absence shape; but he was rather tired at the end of the third day. The next time Aunt Emily decided that she could live without him no longer, he decided, he would make her come over and stay with him and Verena awhile. Her affairs were as disentangleable as his, though she did not think so. He looked forward a little lazily to his evening at home. Old Dr. Blanton, whimsical, kindly, with his pleasant aura of the impossible and leisured Past, was coming in to dinner, to see Verena, who was one of his particular pets, and had returned from her boarding-school the day after he had returned from Aunt Emily's. Probably, for the Tollivers kept an informal welcomeness, some youth might drift in to adore young Verena, or she might have telephoned for one of her girl friends to run in. Amiable old Mrs. Goldsborough the housekeeper was well broken in to adjustable meals. There would be a pitcher of some cool drink waiting on the verandah, for it was a hot day. . . . Poor little Elsa would have to be in that store all day long. . . . He might drive over and take her out to-night.

But when he came up on the porch the placid scene he had been cooling his mind with was not there. Instead, at the door stood his sister Verena, half-crying with helplessness, and apparently trying to send away a dogged-looking, untidy youth who was talking her down. As he jumped out of his car he converged with Dr. Blanton, making his way more hastily than his wont in the direction of Verena.

"Here, what's this?" the two men demanded, Dr. Blanton adding a "sir." The boy turned his batteries on them.

"I tell the young lady, I say, for the love of heaven and your own mother, lady, I say, grant me just one chance to get my college education! I say—"

Dr. Blanton laughed, which did not stop either the boy's vehement gestures with a pencil and pad or his air of determined grovelling.

"Let us talk to him, Verena, my dear. If you have, as this young man seems to feel, a college education in your pocket, you should not be cruel. . . . She hasn't, my son. Now, tell us about it."

The old man's coolness quieted the ridiculous little scene curiously; the boy and girl both stopped their excitement. He turned to Dr. Blanton, who sat himself leisurely down on a rocker, adjusting his glasses with deliberation, and began all over again, rather more slowly.

"I keeping telling the young lady, it for my college education! Only three little dollars in taking a new,

a quite new magazine, and I am helped to win most votes; I get a college education!"

His attitude was one of frank wonder that the magic word "college" had not made Verena immediately present him with the three dollars.

"But it isn't a new magazine—it's one Lucy Latimer's father writes for," said Verena impatiently. "And he simply shouted me down, and then groveled. And his—"

"It *is* new magazine! Fine magazine just come out, I tell you. Would you keep a poor boy from a college education, in free country?" He gestured violently. "What a girl know about which magazine it is?" He came closer to Dr. Blanton, who seemed to have charge of things, vehement and unwashed, and insistent on his ideas.

Before he was finally sent away he had told two or three outright lies and denied them again; he had groveled with waving hands and discoursed on their mothers; he had mentioned in an emotional manner the persecution of denying him privileges as worthy as this in a land of freedom; and finally gone away, apparently not a whit the worse or the better for his argument.

Verena drew a long breath.

"Whew—I'm dead! Let's go get our dinner. Uncle Andrew, how on earth could he pass an examination, even if the magazine did pay his tuition?"

"My dear Verena, brains and ethics—or even brains

and judgment—or brains and bathing—do not necessarily go together. See de Gourmont on the association of ideas," replied Uncle Andrew, stepping aside to let her go in the door. "You will find him extremely helpful in clarifying your thought, though I don't know that you would either. Our young friend just gone has doubtless read more philosophy than you'd think. But he hasn't assimilated it. The young don't—though I feel a temerity in blaming even such a specimen of the young as has just departed, in the present age!"

"Oh, I know—the demon Younger Generation!" said Verena with a jerk of her slim shoulders, and an affectionate squeeze of Dr. Blanton's meagre arm to mitigate it. "But *he* wasn't Younger Generation, except incidentally; he was horridly Bolshevik. . . . Oh, it's nice to get back to your mines of information, and good old Dane's earnest helpfulness in the world. How's Aunt Emily, Dane—as many little tame Causes as ever?"

"Rather more, I think," said Dane, smiling, and a little uneasily conscious that Elsa—his wonderful Elsa!—might rank as a tame cause in Verena's mocking young mind. But Verena was, being of her day, very solemn about herself. Presently she was relating with vivid eyes her wonderful plans for a Poetry Society, to be constructed by herself during the summer vacation. That it might rank as a Cause was a suggestion her brother, conscious of the family bias,

did not hint. And presently she stopped full in the middle of her talk to say doubtfully:

"Perhaps we should have given him his three dollars after all. . . . If only he hadn't been so horrid. . . . But perhaps college would teach him to tell the truth and not cringe and talk about persecution—what do you think, Uncle Andrew? And not try to cheat," she added thoughtfully, for their visitor had certainly made several efforts at misrepresentation.

"I think it might have been better if he had learned all that some time ago," said Uncle Andrew with placid ambiguity.

"He's not college-timber," said Dane, and then, with a sudden memory of Elsa, "but we certainly owe them equal opportunities."

"If they are equally worthy," said Uncle Andrew dreamily. "We mustn't discriminate against ourselves, you know, Dane, because we had the misfortune of being born decent. It isn't really wrong of us."

They laughed, and the talk slid back to Dorrance University. Dr. Blanton was on the Board of Governors, as well as Dane.

"The application list is promising to be overcrowded this year," said Uncle Andrew. "If our young friend with the rug-seller manners is as brilliant as I somehow judge him to be, he will probably crowd out some friend of yours, Renie. Young Walter Dabney, for choice."

Verena looked horror-struck, but only for a moment.

"Oh, but that couldn't possibly happen," she said, cheering up. "The magazine boy couldn't even use good English."

Dr. Blanton, except when he forgot and sat up reading, went to bed early, and Verena was called up and immediately afterwards descended on by a squadron of friends, male and female. Mrs. Goldsborough could be trusted to hover about sufficiently, so when Dane had taken Dr. Blanton home there was still time for him to drive back the short ten miles that lay between him and Elsa. She was rarely through, these summer evenings, till nine or so, and he could drive her in the cooling air till half past eleven, he counted, and get back home by twelve.

The little shop was closed, except for one glimmering light, and he rang, and then passed in, in the way he was accustomed to doing. She should have been sitting, with her little intent manner like a busy child, at the table with her books. But she was not. She was standing in the little room, whose table was still spread. Her mother, talking swiftly in her own language, and another vehement, gesturing figure, seemed between them to fill the room.

Dane seemed to grasp, almost as if it had been one of those things one has always known, that Elsa and the boy were brother and sister. His identity with the magazine-seller of the earlier evening came a second later, with a shock that he could not help, though he reproved himself for its snobbery.

Elsa turned when he came in, with a little quick

cry of gladness, and then seemed to pull herself toward a little less cordiality and a little more dignity, as she introduced her brother. His name was Michael, or what sounded like it.

The moment might have been a little awkward for Dane, but it was not in the least so for Michael. He rushed forward with beaming amiability.

"I have known this gentleman before. How fine that he is your friend, Elsa! I am sure he is a good friend to all he knows. I was talking to him and his sister this afternoon about taking magazines from me to get a college education." (The old mother, getting a word or two of this, beamed with frank pride in the background—a pride which she had never shown in Elsa.) "Perhaps he will take one or even two years from me now, if he is your friend. Elsa will tell you that it is true I can have the college education by selling the magazines, will you not, Elsa?"

He made a dart toward the pad over which he had tried to browbeat little Verena, and approached Dane with what Verena would have described as a "heavy fawn." It would have been funny if it had not been horrible. The horribleness, of course, Dane realized, with another twitch of conscience and of *noblesse oblige,* lay in this bowing, eager creature's relationship to Elsa. Dane could not help glancing at her. But she stood very still, her little eager face held into an unusual immobility.

"All right. Here, I'll take—what is it? Here's five dollars," said Dane to end the scene, and partly be-

cause he felt he should, after all. "I came to see if you could go for a little drive with me, just an hour or so, Miss Elsa. We could take Aunt Emily if you liked."

The boy took the money with more bowings and beamings and thanks. Elsa did not seem to want to go, very much. Neither did Dane, to be frank. The whole affair had spoilt his boyish anticipation of the hours with Elsa. It was made sullied, somehow; the more that the brother, with still-waving hands, and still more groveling exuberance, if the two things can be combined, insisted her into it.

But once out of the hot little overfilled room, with its loud voices and odors of food, the old magic fell on them. The car sprang forward through the velvety, cool night-wind, and he felt the strong vibration of Elsa's presence at his side, and blamed himself for over-sensitiveness. He was not a very imaginative person, Dane Tolliver; a gentleman of the old school, perhaps; apt to be sensitively strict with himself, and to judge that other people must be high-minded because he was. An incongruous severity after a certain point—a far one—was reached, was perhaps the outcome of this judgment. But he did not often arrive at it.

"My brother is very, very clever," said Elsa with a note of pride in her voice. "I only went through grammar-school; I had to work then, so I couldn't go any more, except at nights to the Settlement in New York. Michael went through high-school."

"Then how is it you speak so much better English?" demanded Dane, holding back the rest of the questions on the point of their difference, out of sheer decency.

Her great dark eyes lighted eagerly, as she turned her little vivid face to his in the half-darkness.

"Because Michael was so set on getting studies. You have to watch—oh, so hard—to speak good English. He says a degree will get him much farther ahead than anything else. He says he can pick up other things afterwards, or even if he doesn't, when he has made money—"

"But you know that isn't true, Elsa. Self-respect is worth a great deal; more than anything else, we think."

She looked a little downcast in the darkness. Then she spoke defiantly.

"Self-respect is a very expensive luxury for the poor."

Dane was first rebuffed by what she had said in her clan-feeling, then began to think of it. . . . Yes. . . . perhaps over there it had been different, a place where self-respect was hard. . . . He was in love with Elsa, that was the long and the short of it. And in his love and in his desire to be fair to these people who had had so much less chance than he—Aunt Emily's phrases trooped into his mind and stayed there—he built excuses in his mind for the alternate fawning and snarling of Elsa's brother. He was a prospective citizen, who had come eagerly to America with high expectations of the golden gifts she had for him;

he should not be crushed by disappointments. The opportunity denied him over there should be given him full measure here. The—

. . . But nevertheless it was a comfort to find that he and Elsa were only half-brother and sister!

"He is working so hard to get the highest number of subscriptions," Elsa had said, with that little note of warmth in her voice that a woman only has for her child, or, sometimes, the younger brother or sister whom she has mothered. . . . Perhaps . . . after all . . . He turned to Elsa at his side, and began to question her about herself. It was a story of bravery, of hard work, of supporting at first the younger half-brother, and finally the old mother; and, on the whole, he could not help seeing, of wonderful help given her from first to last. Settlements, people at lectures, people where she worked, after the first six months of her childhood in a sweat-shop—everywhere the whole machinery of helpfulness had helped Elsa move forward, from the time when she came over as a small child. An uncle had helped to support her till she had finished grammar-school. After that every one in the family had focused on Michael, who, apparently, had focused quite as wholeheartedly on himself. The old mother, the uncle, even a cousin in Poland, had helped Michael ahead, at all possible costs. The lower West side school he had gone through with flying colors, as far as book-learning was concerned, had lifted him to the point where he was perfectly capable of passing his entrance exami-

nations for college. Once he had won this competition which the *Woman's Outlook* had instituted, and his sister seemed both passionately anxious and exceedingly sure he would, he would go through Dorrance University, and then become a doctor or a lawyer. He had chosen Dorrance because of its superior prestige, Elsa said frankly. And he had planned having his mother and sister's business near enough so he could live with them, which would be cheaper.

All Elsa's devotion and passion were concentrated, Dane could see plainly, on the brother and his career. It had never occurred to her to question why he should be pushed ahead at her expense; she was willing and glad that it should be so. But presently, as the car drove slowly now through the cooling evening, Dane forgot about the brother. Elsa herself, with her charm and her ardent feelings and her quick articulateness; yes, and her eyes and her little deft hands and her voice with its sweetness and quaint precision, were all that the world contained. Himself a man of no great articulateness, to whom things were the harder to express the more deeply he felt about them, Elsa's swift flexibility of mind and capacity for self-expression had an especial charm. Men of his type are drawn either by what is most like them or what is most different; and Dane was drawn to Elsa by their differences.

Elsa herself had forgotten about the business of life; nearly about the brother, it seemed, by the time

they had come back to her house. There was still a little light. He drove away, building all sorts of dreams. It is probable that Elsa, going sedately to bed in her little hot room where, now, the old mother slept also, had her dreams as well.

Dane went on with the routine business of his work and play. Most men can do this, even when they are walking on air, and carrying on a courtship with the one girl in all the world. But the routine, at this time, makes very little impression on them. Aunt Emily, deep in her welfare work for her village, noticed, and beamed romantically but in silence. She was a well-bred aunt who kept her mouth shut. Verena, in the full tide of life at its most excellent—as the life of sixteen is said to be nowadays—noticed nothing much, not even when Dane drove her over to see Elsa and took the girls out together. She was fascinated by Elsa, as most people susceptible to charm were, and forgot about her next day. As for Dr. Blanton, the little family's closest intimate, he was accounted too much a dreamer to worry about affairs not his own. If Dane had been negotiating for something in the way of incunabula, now, it would have been different, doubtless.

And so it was rather a thunderbolt when Dane, one evening when he had not, for decency's sake, gone again to see Elsa—he had seen her three times that week—found a flushed and passionate Elsa on his own porch, at five o'clock. For Elsa to leave her

cherished business at quarter past four, as she must have done to take the trolley over to Dorrance, meant that something rather wild must have occurred.

She had been holding him off—definitely keeping him from what they both knew was the formality only of actual speaking of their marriage; but as he came up the steps she caught his hands with a cry that swept away the last fragile straw barrier between them, and landed her in his arms.

"Elsa—Elsa darling, what is it?" he said anxiously, drawing her into the house.

She lay still in his hold for a moment, as if protection and love were very good. Then she drew away and began to talk vehemently.

"It is Michael. You can help us—you must help us. You love me; I know you do. And I love you. He has got the award of the magazine. He can pay his tuition in the college. And they are persecuting him. Because he is foreign, they will not let him in. He has passed examinations, good examinations, and because they wrote and asked his school principal if he was—oh, I do not know what—if he made friends, and if he had public spirit—as if a boy his age could have public spirit! . . ."

Till now the delight of her in his arms, and the frankness of her facing their love—for he had been afraid for some little time now, so steadfastly had she held away from him, that she did not care for him, that he had not paid much attention to what

she was saying. He had always rather shut Michael's relationship to her out of his mind, anyway, as one does half-admittedly disagreeable things. But now, though still holding her, and in a tension of happiness because of it, he spoke, as he could not help speaking; as any one of the Lee Tollivers would have spoken since the first one came away from a very comfortable estate in England for conscience' sake.

"Any boy of any age should have public spirit. You know that if you stop to think, Elsa."

"I don't know what it is," she said angrily.

"It is what you have yourself, when you work with Aunt Emily on your village improvement plans," he told her gently. "And you're talking a little wildly, dear, when you talk of persecution. Haven't you always been helped, yourself? People are just as ready to help your brother."

"If you think that is so, then help him," said Elsa tensely. "He will be your brother too, if you marry me—unless you do not want to marry a poor girl, a peasant, from a strange country—without money—without friends—without any of the grand things you have!"

He looked at her strangely.

"Elsa, is that what you think of me?"

She burst into tears.

"Oh, forgive me! I am nearly wild with it all. Michael walks up and down the house and talks of it all day long. He says they persecute him—and

indeed, isn't it persecution to keep a boy from college, who can pay, and who has passed the examination?"

Elsa was very warm and vibrant in his arms. He loved her very dearly.

"It doesn't seem fair," he said.

"Then you'll make all the others stop it? You are on the Board of Governors. I know. Michael found out. It is the old clergyman, the one Michael saw the first day, when he tried to sell your sister the magazine, who is his head persecutor, Michael says."

Dane laughed aloud in the revulsion of his feelings. Old Uncle Andrew, kindest and saintliest of men, most ineffectual and dreamy soul on earth? He *was* on the faculty, holding a chair of some dreamy language which not one student in twenty ever elected, Dane remembered now. But as a trampler of Michael!

"Uncle Andrew as a persecutor is simply plain funny, Elsa," he said, when she looked at him indignantly. "He couldn't persecute a mosquito. His very housekeeper rides over him rough-shod. Your brother's excited. I seem to remember that he excited easily," he couldn't help adding. The whole thing was too funny, with Uncle Andrew in it!

But it was not funny to Elsa, he was to find. Elsa, too easily in earnest, too easily tragic under her little quick bright ways, was tragic now.

"You don't love me," she said, as other women

have said before her. "And even if you do, it will do you no good. . . . I will never see you again, if you do not make them let Michael into college."

"Single-handed?" Dane tried to be light about it. "My child, I might stand out forever, and if the rest of the board were against me it wouldn't do any good. This is still more or less of a democracy."

She considered this awhile, her finger on her lip. Her eyes, still wet, looked up at his piteously; she was like an animal fighting for its young.

"But you'll do everything you can to make them have Michael?" she begged.

"Everything," said Dane, for the old Lee Tollivers had their hands on his shoulder, "in fairness."

"Everything!" said Elsa passionately, "or I will never see you as long as I live."

It might have been just a girl's threat; but he knew already his Elsa's immovability when such things as these were in question; and the strength of purpose which had carried her where she was to-day could be trusted to hold her to what she was saying now, even though she looked at him with love as she said it.

The struggle went on until he took her home. As he left her at the door he caught a glimpse of Michael, rushing across the floor to find out what success she had had. Somehow the sight jarred on him.

He did not realize that there was so much seriousness in the matter until he attended the meeting of the Board of Governors.

He dropped into a seat by Dr. Blanton.

"I hear you've become a Head Persecutor, Uncle Andrew," he said, lightly, and yet with a certain anxiousness.

But the old man did not smile; he looked troubled. "I hope not—I hope not," he said.

"Just how do things stand?" he asked.

"The lists are overcrowded," said another member of the board, from Dr. Blanton's other side. "We have to weed pretty sharply. A college only holds so many. Desire for learning is admirable, I suppose," he added, with a half-laugh.

Dane looked around the little room at the governors, alumni all, good men and true; some better and some worse than others, of course, but all honest, according to their better or worse lights; all public-spirited, so far as he knew, and loving their college as one loves the things one has not only known in boyhood, but worked for and given to. He tried to remember that he was bound to be prejudiced in favor of men who were his old friends; to think that they were bound to be right. But even with all the pressure he brought on his own sensitive conscience, he could not feel that they would be unfair. Narrow, perhaps. . . . He must remember that. He must throw all his influence against narrowness, class prejudice, overvaluation of standards because they were one's own. . . . Nevertheless the memory of shrieking, unself-respecting young Michael, speaking to Verena as she had never been spoken to in her life for the sake

of forcing her to buy something she did not need or want, intensified itself before his mind.

While he had been thinking, sunk in himself, a dozen candidates had been reviewed rapidly. The Board of Governors was sitting only on the doubtful cases; naturally there were a proportion of boys who had been passed unquestionably. There were six or seven more on the list than could be crowded in by any possible effort, after what seemed almost a too severe heightening of the scholarship requirements.

He helped the men discuss pro and con a score of cases before they reached Michael. He was braced for what defense he could give, but curiously enough found it was not necessary. With the mention of Michael Polokoff's name the vice-head of the local settlement house, one of the two women on the board, sprang to arms for him.

"He has passed a wonderful entrance examination," she said. "That's admitted. And he has worked as no native American could work, to earn the prize of tuition that a magazine offered. I have talked to him myself. He has the most wonderful ideals. . . . We do not realize how much our new element . . ."

"Has to give us," Dane finished the cliché in his mind, and then heard Uncle Andrew say in a sharply cut voice very unlike his ordinary one, "What?"

Miss Dabney was a little posed. She stammered.

"Why—why—new enthusiasm! Love of beauty, wonderful clan feeling. . . ."

"Ethics?"

"Wonderful ethics! I tell you, that boy, when I talked to him, expressed a feeling of brotherhood, of passion for the downtrodden, of selflessness. . . ."

Dane, recollecting the cool way Michael had accepted the sacrifice of his mother and sister, and the frank desire he had shown to trade on Dane's friendship for Elsa, remembered also that Miss Dabney *was* a little given to accepting the expression of a feeling as the actual possession of it. And he realized also, with dismay, that every word she said was being discounted by the business brain he possessed, and the unconscious estimate he had made of Michael from the beginning—an estimate, nevertheless, more generous than he would have made of a boy of his own clan; and—Elsa was waiting for the one gift he had ever been able to make her. And yet—if college would make Michael more the man he should be. . . .

Uncle Andrew was speaking again, one tremulous old hand pulling at his little pointed gray beard.

"A desire for a college education is laudable. But our national passion for education blinds our romantic eyes to the fact that all kinds of education are not suited to all kinds of people. My personal knowledge of this boy does not lead me to think that he is a suitable subject for matriculation at Dorrance."

There was an outcry. Dane found that he had underestimated the chivalry of the board toward Michael and his kind. Miss Dabney's shrill voice pierced through the confusion—

"Wonderful scholarship . . . wonderful feeling for . . ."

Then the voice of the President of the board, unmoved, weighty:

"You would not make such a drastic statement as that without reasons, I know, Dr. Blanton. Won't you give them to the Board?"

"They will sound, perhaps, a little odd, perhaps," said Uncle Andrew half-apologetically. "Frank judgments on the sins of one's fellows do somehow, nowadays. But it is possible to be intemperately tolerant; and very hurtful. The boy in question, to my knowledge, is capable of lying, bullying, financial deception in a small way, he possesses neither honesty, self-respect, self-control nor courtesy. I do not think we should let the fact that he is of the immigrant class, through a fear of being unfair to him, make us unfair to ourselves and—our country."

Miss Dabney frankly considered Dr. Blanton out-of-date, and the fact of his negligibility was peeping out of her manner as she answered.

"We've only your word for it, Dr. Blanton; and things are looked at differently nowadays. I don't think anybody else here knows of any of these—these cruel charges to make against a friendless immigrant boy."

("The female of the species," said Grannis, the member next Dane, in a low voice. "That's what comes of women on boards—always going off their heads on personalities.")

"I think," Dr. Blanton answered her quietly, "that others here may have."

. . . Elsa. If he was honest, if he backed up Uncle Andrew and spoke against the admission of this boy —and after all, what difference did the admission or barring out of one boy make?—he would have to tell Elsa. And Elsa was more to him than anything on heaven or earth. . . . Elsa, who—he knew her—had meant what she said about giving him up forever.

More than anything—but the hands of the men and women of his race behind him were on his shoulder again. Not more than his conscience . . . not more than his country, to whom a man like this, with the weapon of Dorrance's stamp and of being a college graduate, would be an enemy. With all the importance he knew himself to have on the Board, all the influence he knew he had because of what he was and what he stood for, he spoke as decisively as Dr. Blanton had.

"Yes, Miss Dabney, I have. I have seen and known enough of him to feel as Dr. Blanton feels, that in spite of his brilliant scholarship Michael Polokoff is absolutely undesirable, and for the reasons he gives."

"Would you say the same if he were a Lee Tolliver?" demanded Miss Dabney fiercely.

"I would say the same," said Dane steadily, "if he were my own brother."

The next thing that happened at that meeting had, perhaps, never happened at a meeting of the staid and honorable Board of Governors of Dorrance Uni-

versity before. The door of the little study next the room where the meeting was going on was dashed open, and Michael strode melodramatically into the room. He was livid and panting with the swift, wild anger of uncontrolled peoples. By Miss Dabney's stricken face Dane knew electrically that she had been persuaded to bring him or let him come in some way, but had not realized that he would listen or enter. His thick, wet-looking black hair was tossed about his furious face, and he was nearly hysterical. He must have heard the whole thing. Indeed, he stated as much.

"I have heard you all!" he shouted to the group of silent men. "I have heard you listen to these two aristocrats, these men who hate and despise and persecute me because I have not had their opportunity; who would keep opportunity that I have toiled for from me. . . ."

Well, it was soapbox oratory, from one standpoint. From another it was very moving. He demanded fair play, he spoke of the spirit of *noblesse oblige* being lacking, he demanded public spirit and the gift of equality from them. He told in detail intimate incidents of his own life and his family's, showing how poor they were and had been, and how hard they worked. He spared the Board not one private horror or personal emotion. Miss Dabney sat with a moved face. Mr. Grannis, whose house the Board Meeting was held in, still looked as annoyed as any man would be likely to under the circumstances. The rest of the

Board listened quietly—more quietly than Michael had expected, for finally he ran down, finishing rather lamely, and dropping into his note of what Uncle Andrew had called "rug-selling" again. That is, he whined.

There was silence when he had finished at last. He cast one glance at himself in the Grannis' long old-fashioned pier-glass, a wild and, from a distance, picturesque young figure gesturing in the midst of the silent Americans. Then he folded his arms and leaned against the door, shivering a little with fatigue.

Then the President of the Board—it was Mr. Grannis—spoke.

"Dr. Blanton, I wonder if you would mind making things clear to this young man from your viewpoint."

Uncle Andrew rose stiffly, and bowed punctiliously to him. "With pleasure, sir; though I fear I cannot make anything clear. Truth is in the ear of the beholder. But I will explain my viewpoint to him." He turned abruptly—more abruptly than such an old man could have turned, you would have thought, and addressed the boy, leaning sulkily against the door with folded arms.

"I am going," said he, "to speak to you just as rudely as you have spoken to us. . . . You demand fair play, *noblesse oblige*, public spirit, of us, Michael. You don't have any idea that you should give it back. Your idea of fair play is, apparently, getting all you can for yourself, and at best a close corporation of your relatives, and taking advantage of our American

sensitiveness and feelings that we owe you everything because we are better off than you, to force us to the wall. You say we owe you an education if you can pay for it—we have a right to ask you what you are going to do with it. If you whined and lied your way into this scholarship you are going to go on whining and lying your way through the world, with the help of our good name. We have the right to demand of you a decent outlook on the world, and decent treatment of the world. You have proved to the satisfaction, I should think, of every one present, that you will never get it. If you would listen at a door tonight, you would do as tricky a thing six years from now, when you're a professional man, by grace of Dorrance. You have brains, but you have no genuine ideals, and I should not say that you had very many principles. This country needs men in power who are right-minded; with your brains and persistence you will go far. I think you will go in the wrong direction; and so far as I can help it you shall not go, backed by Dorrance."

Michael had with difficulty kept still during all this. He flung out his arms now with what promised to be another wild appeal; but Mr. Grannis spoke.

"So far as I am concerned the fact that you eavesdropped settles your eligibility with me, if you had passed with the highest marks the university ever gave. Of course, I cannot say how the rest of these gentlemen will vote. I must ask you to withdraw, now,

Mr. Polokoff. We have been guilty of an irregularity in letting you be present so long, as it is."

The boy went out, curiously enough, at the tone of command, as a small child would have done.

"I am going to tell Elsa!" was his last word to Dane. The words were childish, but tone and expression were not.

The chairman spoke.

"What is your pleasure on the admission of Michael Polokoff, gentlemen?"

"It may stir up trouble with the foreign element," said one of the members who was a politician, anxiously. But nobody paid attention to him. Except for Miss Dabney, the vote against Michael was unanimous.

Dane made his way straight to Elsa that night. It was not his way to avoid issues. He had gone with his conscience; he had spoken against Michael; he had lost Elsa, who was more to him than anything on earth. But—there was a fighting chance of Elsa still, and he was going to take it.

He had half feared that the door would be locked against him, but Elsa rose to greet him from the little inner room. She was very white.

He could not make out her mood. . . . Her little loving face that was so dear to him was like a mask. She was firm in some resolve; he could not tell what.

"Michael has told me," she said first. "The old clergyman brought him home. He was so angry he

was sick." Dane braced himself for the inevitable rest. But instead, all at once she flung her arms on the red-covered table, dropped her brown head on them and began to cry, softly and heartbrokenly. "I am so ashamed! I am so ashamed!" were the incredible words she said.

"Of what, darling?" he said, putting his arm around her shaking shoulders.

She did not push him away, which gave him heart.

"Of Michael; and of me, for never showing him how to be a good citizen. I was older, I should. He told me . . . all the things he did, and the things they said. And the old clergyman . . . he explained to me. He was . . . like you. . . . Dane, oh, Dane, I can't marry you. Not because you didn't make them take Michael; but because I couldn't see why they shouldn't—why he wasn't all right—and you could. . . . We'd never fit . . . we'd never be happy. . . . Michael." Womanlike she began to defend the brother she had been condemning, classing herself with him in her fury of pity. "When did it ever pay us to be good, to practise *noblesse oblige*—to be fairer than the other person—over there? We've never had a chance at honor! It—it takes strong people to be honorable when the odds are against them, and nobleness means losing your only little, least chance to survive and breathe! Michael's people—never had a chance at honor. . . . Mine—my father—was different—not crushed down so. You—you can't understand. We haven't courage yet to do anything but

snatch at all the advantages, fair or unfair. We're afraid to yield a foot of advantage—afraid to have self-respect. Over there if we did we—went down."

"My beloved," Dane spoke huskily, "don't you see how wonderful you are, to be able to say all this—"

"I am not wonderful. I am a woman who has fought for years, and fought under a wrong banner. And I should not know it or see it now if I did not love you so much more than anything on earth that I am swept toward seeing things your way. How do I even know I am right now? . . . But I do know—I can not marry you, with a brother you would always despise, and I—oh, my heart—I must be ashamed of him too."

"But darling, we can help him—we can teach him, maybe—"

"I can, perhaps: not if I marry you. . . . Michael wanted me to use my influence with the people here, to make dreadful trouble because of him, because they love me and are proud of me. And—I will tell you the truth—for a little I was angry and wanted to. And then what the old man said, and you, came back over me like a flood, and I could not. . . . Oh, what are right and wrong for a woman? Just loving one man or another man? . . . I am not sure of myself yet. . . . Oh, Dane, I love you so I would die for you. . . ."

He had her tight in his arms now, kissing the little wet face passionately. "You aren't to die for me—you're to marry me, now, this week, my own Elsa."

She lay in his arms for a moment, clinging close. . . . "It would be good to be with you—so good! . . . I did not know I could love anything as I love you—"

"Then marry me—now. There's nothing else on earth matters—"

She drew herself from him resolutely.

"No. Perhaps some time—if I can show Michael the things that count, if I can help my people. Have patience, my dearest one. . . . I can teach them what loving you has taught me, maybe . . . oh, I am strong now, loving you so!"

THAT OTHER EILEEN

THE two men stood outside a bedroom door, one with his hand on the other's arm, in an unconsciously sharp clutch of anxiety.

"It's bad, Dr. Blanton, or Jessie wouldn't have sent for you to tell me," he said. "Won't she live?"

The old clergyman smiled.

"She is not in any danger. You, as a doctor, should know what the other doctors have told us—Eileen was out of danger weeks ago."

"I was afraid—a sudden relapse—" said the other, with a look of haggard terror. It was his wife, whom he loved more than anything else in the world. Then his face lighted. "If she's better I can go in."

Dr. Blanton held him back.

"They think not. I know you should not till I've told you."

"For heaven's sake tell me, then!"

"She's not delirious any longer. She will be able to be up, as well as ever, in a few days. That's the good news. . . ."

"But the bad? For heaven's sake, Uncle Andrew—"

"She doesn't remember. She's gone back. . . ."

"All the more reason," said her husband resolutely, "that I should go in and see her."

"I wouldn't—"

He opened the bedroom door. . . .

. . . . . .

Eileen had been lying in bed when she came to her senses. It was late afternoon, and the sun fell in a long bar across her bed and tinged one of the two thick plaits of red-brown hair that lay on the coverlet. She thought lazily that the plaits looked much longer lying there than when she had braided them the night before. Then she thought in the same dreamy fashion that the room was unfamiliar. But her eyes were tired, and often a room looks strange when you're not fully awake. She gazed about her—it *was* a strange room, for this was a double bed in which she now lay in solitary state, and her own was so small. An unexpected figure caught her eye.

"Jessie must have been worried about me!" she thought, for a professional nurse sat near-by. Eileen saw that the nurse was looking at her.

"I'm all right now, I think," she said pleasantly. "Is it—is it too late for me to get up and be married?" Her face flushed as she spoke, and she laughed shyly. She felt quite well, though tired as she was, she dreaded a little the ordeal of the marriage ceremony. And last night seemed so dim and far away. Perhaps her sleep had been troubled with dreams, for even the plans for the wedding were hard to remember.

"It's all right," answered the nurse hastily; "you don't need to get up—you—you have plenty of time. You had better go to sleep again."

Eileen laughed and sat up against the pillows, rubbing her eyes with a child-like gesture.

"But, my dear nurse, I'm not sleepy," she expostulated, "and I want to know about a lot of things. To begin with, why did my sister have me sent here? Please tell me—where am I, and how long have I been unconscious, and"—Eileen hesitated—"what about Mr. Hardy? My sister told you, didn't she? We were to be married to-day,"—for the first time her face showed alarm—"is it still *to-day?*"

The nurse answered hurriedly, with a little catch in her voice, "Yes," and mumbling an excuse left the room. Eileen's troubled eyes wandered to the soft, close-drawn curtains and the big mirrors. But she felt too weak and tired to care much about anything. Even Victor seemed a dim and distant figure. Victor—he had such quick, emphatic gestures—hadn't he?—and brown eyes, and after all a comforting calm when you least expected it. Yes; that was Victor.

Presently as she brushed back the tendrils of hair which had fallen over her forehead, she saw something on her left hand that made her gasp in astonishment. On her third finger shone a wedding-ring. Evidently she had been unconscious longer than she thought. And Victor had actually done that which one sometimes reads of in papers—married her while in a desperate illness—so that if she died she would at least be his in death.

So that was off her mind! And with a contented smile she sank again into the pillows.

Her sister Jessie was at the bedside when Eileen awoke. Jessie's round face was the only familiar thing in all this strangeness.

"Tell me the whole thing, Jess," she demanded. "I must have lost several weeks since 'last night'."

"Eileen—" stammered Jessie, and Eileen, her little hand seeking that of her sister, laughed.

"If you're responsible for my being married to Victor while I couldn't object, I forgive you."

"I suppose I'm the one to tell you," Jessie said, in a choked voice, "but I don't know where to begin."

"At the beginning, naturally," Eileen answered with a little laugh. "How long have I been ill?"

"Five weeks this time. Oh, Eileen, don't laugh!" Jessie whispered as if some one were dead.

Eileen felt a cold shiver of fear creeping over her.

"This time?" she repeated.

Jessie began to cry softly, and did not answer until Eileen repeated the question.

"It's eight years!" said Jessie, between sobs. "Eight years! You—you're twenty-six, Eileen."

Eileen sat up and clutched the ribbons at her throat.

"Eight years!" she repeated incredulously. "It isn't true—it isn't! Give me a hand-glass."

Eileen snatched the mirror from Jessie's hand and stared at herself. What she saw was nearer the girl of eighteen than she had dared to hope. Thinner, perhaps, and the plaits longer, but still the same rich red-brown. Except for a ghastly pallor she could detect

no difference in feature or coloring. The only change she could define was in the expression. This face looked as if it *knew*. In so far as she could see, she was just the Eileen Arden who had danced and laughed and wondered the night before her wedding.

Eileen laid down the glass with a shudder.

"I have heard that such things happened," she could hear herself saying with singular composure, "but I didn't think they happened to people one knows, let alone—*yourself*. Jessie, where's Victor? Tell him I'm not angry; he was afraid I would be, wasn't he?"

She stopped short, for poor trembling Jessie had dropped to her knees beside the bed. Eileen noticed there were gray threads in her sister's pretty dark hair. Of course, eight years—

"How shall I tell you?" Jessie managed to utter brokenly.

"Is he dead?" Eileen demanded hoarsely. "Oh, Jess, tell me, tell me everything! I'll go mad if you don't."

Jessie tried to compose herself. She had been mother as well as sister to Eileen for many years, and what was asked of her she endeavored to do, if it were humanly possible.

"Eileen, dear, you remember dancing with Victor the night before you were to have married him and suddenly losing your balance? You remember striking your head against the sharp corner of the musicians' platform?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Eileen impatiently, "but that's all I do remember, and it's vague and misty. Have I been asleep eight years? That *couldn't* happen!"

"No," faltered Jessie, "that didn't happen. But when you regained consciousness, dear, you—you *went back.*"

"What do you mean?" Eileen questioned impatiently. Was she the victim of some dreadful brain disease, she wondered. Oh, if Jessie would only tell her all that had taken place during those blank years!

Jessie looked at her sister with pitying eyes.

"You *went back,*" she repeated. "You thought you were a little girl again. Everything that had occurred in the interval between twelve and eighteen was obliterated."

It sounded to Eileen like sheer delirium, and she stared at her sister blankly.

"You've heard of such things, haven't you?" Jessie asked. "Oh, it was terrible! Yours was a famous case; and doctors came from all over the world to see you. Though I hated them for watching you and publishing their theories, I didn't dare to send any of them away, for fear that he might be the very one to cure you. Oh, Eileen, can't you remember one single thing?—not even dear old Dr. Blanton, the clergyman you liked so much, or Alistair Gray?"

"No!" said Eileen despairingly. "No, no, no! You must tell me, Jessie. Don't you see that you must?—everything!"

"I am trying," said Jessie gently, "but I can't do it

all at once. When you first recovered from the accident we thought you were pretending to forget, but you were so upset and suffered so much when we doubted you that we soon knew you were not. Oh, dear, it was heart-breaking! You asked for—mother."

The mother who had died when Eileen was fifteen!

"And I went through all that sorrow again?" Eileen cried, "Oh, poor little girl! Jessie, how could God—"

"I don't know," said Jessie dully. "I don't know. But, dear, can't you guess what else was blotted out from your mind? You had only known Victor a year—"

Eileen sprang up again, her little figure shaking.

"I forget Victor?" she cried passionately. "Jessie, I couldn't—*I couldn't!*"

"Yes, you forgot Victor," said her sister, in a shaking voice.

But there was the ring on her hand, and Eileen consoled herself. Even if she had lost eight years of her life, all the rest were intact; and after all twenty-six years wasn't so old for a married woman. Suppose she had forgotten him, and he had had to win his suit all over again—why, Jessie needn't look so tragic about it!

"You forgot him," Jessie repeated. "You didn't even like him. And you wanted your dolls and a skipping rope, and thought you were in school again. You were happy, except when the doctors worried you—that was my only comfort."

"Well," said Eileen, "go on."

"I gave in to you finally," Jessie continued, "and moved away from the place where we lived. I dressed you like a child, and let you grow up again. It was a blessing you were so little and childish-looking. People never suspected that you were not a girl of twelve—nobody, that is, but Dr. Blanton and Alistair. They said that you would go on developing and grow up all over again, and so it proved. Some day, they believed, your mind would catch up with itself, and you would remember everything. But to come back this way—with everything for the last eight years forgotten—oh, I wish you remembered! Try, dear, they said that you would."

"I can't now," said Eileen, "but I may if you tell me more. Can't I see Victor?"

"You hated Victor," Jessie went on. "They thought it was because you subconsciously disliked him for having been the cause of your fall."

Poor Victor! She could remember her lover's eyes. Poor Victor!—but how ridiculous, when he had been her husband all this time!

"So finally he gave you up."

Eileen for a second felt her senses slipping.

"Am I not married to Victor?" she demanded.

"No," said Jessie, covering her face with her hands.

"Then—then—who?"

"Alistair Gray."

Eileen did not faint or cry out. Her brain held steady, and she wondered vaguely that it should—the brain that had betrayed her. She looked at Jessie,

now thoroughly frightened—poor, loving Jessie who had done her best.

"I've broken it to you all wrong!" she cried piteously. "Oh, Eileen, speak; say something!"

"You've broken—everything," said Eileen slowly. Then the power of thought came back and she began to talk breathlessly. "Oh, Victor, Victor! I love him—and I'll never love any one else! And you let me be tied to this other man. I can't even remember him! And he's had me all these years when I wasn't myself. Perhaps he's thought—Jessie, has he thought —" she hesitated, then finished weakly, "that I liked him?"

"You love Alistair very much," said Jessie steadily. "It's only that you don't remember. You see, dear, you have awakened *before* you were eighteen again."

What did Eileen care for problems in arrested mental development! She went straight to the thing that concerned her most.

"Love Alistair! Love a man who would marry another man's sweetheart when she was insane? You are absurd. Did you say he was a doctor? He couldn't have been a very good one."

"A famous one," asserted Jessie. "Eileen, you surely recollect. Don't you remember how he loved you, and how you feared that you'd recall having cared for another man? You said that to me several times before—well, not five weeks ago."

Eileen shook her head.

"Oh, it's *hideous!*" she gasped. "I—I wish I could

kill myself! Perhaps, after all, that is the best way out. Oh, my poor Victor!"

A man's face floated before her eyes as she spoke, familiar and loving; she could hear him saying: "My own dear little wife!"

Her sister's voice, protesting, aroused her. "I'll tell you something else," she was saying. "Victor doesn't need your pity. He married two years before you did, and his wife's only been dead a year."

"When did I marry?" Eileen asked finally, "or rather, when did you let that poor, insane child marry this creature, Alistair Gray?"

"When you thought you were sixteen," Jessie answered, "though you were really twenty-two."

Eight years—how awful! and that waltz of last night still throbbing in her brain! She could hear the violins:

"Your dream-love,
Wait for her;
She'll—be—true—"

And Victor, Victor!—whose warm hands and vivid eyes were as real as if he were actually by her side. Victor had not waited! And now, by a turn of the wheel, Victor was free again, and she— It was detestable, but one thing stood out as the essence of dreadfulness—her marriage to the unknown Alistair Gray. She could not hate Victor or Jessie, because she loved them; she could only feel cruelly hurt. But Alistair Gray she hated.

"Alistair—" Jessie began again timidly.

"I won't see him," Eileen cried out wildly. "I will drown myself! I will not—"

"Dr. Gray wants to know if Mrs. Gray can see him. Dr. Blanton is here, too, Miss Arden," said a maid's voice in a whisper at the door of the chamber. But Eileen's sharpened senses could have heard the words miles away.

"No, no, no!" she screamed, losing the last remnant of her self-control. But it was too late.

The door opened, and there stood a man on the threshold. His face was dimly familiar, yet no feeling of affection stirred in her heart, only a vague friendliness at most; then even that was swamped by the surge of hate she felt for Alistair Gray. She only caught a sight of the figure, then hid her eyes in her hands. The outline of another man's figure might have been seen in the hall—the other doctor, doubtless, —but Eileen was so obsessed by the horror of meeting her unknown husband that she did not notice. The scream that rose to her lips was never uttered, for everything went black again and she fainted.

When she came to herself Jessie was by her side, but the others had gone. Eileen did not speak at once; there seemed to be such a lot of thinking to be done that she lay perfectly still. Her mind was quite clear now. She had been brought up to consider duty paramount and—she was married to Alistair Gray! Ought she—could she—

When she spoke to Jessie, it was in a firm, cold voice.

"I'm well enough to dress," she said, "please help me. You needn't tell me about any of the things that you were planning to do, for it will do no good. If I'm given time, I may forgive the man; but I won't stay in the same house with him. You allowed me to get into this horrible situation; now you must help me out. Tell that Alistair Gray you tied me to that I absolutely refuse to see him or stay here. Tell him to send me away where I can be alone. Tell him that if I stay away long enough I may go mad again and remember him. That should have the proper effect!"

"You were never mad," Jessie began helplessly; "it was only—"

"Whatever it was," Eileen cut her short fiercely, "help me to get away from this house."

She sprang from the bed and stood holding a chair, a pitiful childish figure with her long plaits and staring eyes.

"Oh, yes, yes, Eileen; I'll do everything you wish!" cried Jessie, putting her arms around the "little sister" who was still to be protected and humored and petted. "Only get back into bed. I'll go and arrange things the best I can with Alistair."

Eileen, not unwillingly, did as she was bidden, for her first wave of anger, spent, physical weakness threatened to overcome her. After what seemed years of waiting, Jessie returned.

"Alistair is willing you should go," she said. Somehow Eileen hated him the more for it. "He gave me a message for you," Jessie went on quickly. "He said:

'Tell her I'll wait for her as long as she likes—forever—*I am the one for whom she cares,* although she may not remember me now. I'll wait for her—and in the end she'll want me again."

Eileen let Jessie help her on with clothes she had never before seen, of a fashion she did not know, but finer and more beautiful than any she remembered. They were clothes that belonged to the other Eileen—Eileen Gray, Alistair Gray's wife—and she hated the touch of them.

Every detail of the journey had been carefully arranged. Automobile, train, carriage—and by nightfall she was lying on a couch in a fine old house in the country, served perfectly, and surrounded by luxuries for which she had often wished in the old days, but never expected to enjoy. Eileen was too tired to think, and took deliberate pleasure in the strange loveliness and comfort of her surroundings.

But next morning, the tangled strands of her life lay before her. Not the least of her trials was the sense of unreality which pervaded everything. Surely she would go to sleep some night and wake up to find that she had dreamed the whole wretched story. She could hear herself telling Victor: "And I dreamed my hair was *that* much longer, dear, away down to my knees!" The lengthening of her hair and a flitting expression of sweet wisdom that she occasionally surprised in her glass were the only tangible tokens she had of the lost years. One other thing troubled her. She slept dreamlessly, in so far as she knew, but twice she awoke

to find herself smiling and on the point of saying: "Good-morning, dearest—"

It was some little time before she realized that it was the other Eileen, that poor miserable little thing they had married to Alistair Gray, who was about to offer the greeting. *She* remembered him in sleep and loved him! Eileen felt her cheeks burn,—it was ghastly!

She wanted to be faithful to her husband, but how could she when she hated him, and loved and remembered only Victor?

"Your dream-love,
Wait for her;
She'll—be—true—"

The mocking music always came with the thought of Victor's vivid brown face. She could not remember much that they had said or done in those days, eight years ago. There was only the memory of the face, and the overwhelming love that came with it.

She took to walking a great deal in the garden, and tried to think and, above all, to remember. Queer half-thoughts, half-pictures rose in her mind like phantoms; a brisk ride in the autumn wind; a leaf that caught in her hair; a room all browns and golds alight with the glow of a crackling fire, and a girl in blue playing on the piano; a man's voice—could that voice belong to the tall figure, the gray eyes and hair she had seen in the doorway? And through all the pictures

was the agonizing memory of Victor and their love. The thought of him dominated her mind—Victor's dark eyes, his slight boyish figure, his steadfastness and protecting care. It was as if no moment of those lost years had been without him. And all the while she was married to Alistair Gray!

It was while she was in this mood, one night, that Eileen was summoned to the telephone. A man's voice answered.

"This is Alistair, Eileen."

Eileen struggled a moment for words.

"Good evening, Doctor Gray," she said inadequately at last.

"Eileen!"

Eileen strove to compose herself, then answered: "If you please, I would rather not speak to you." Then losing her self-control, "Promise you won't come to me—promise you'll leave me alone till I say. Oh, I don't want to hate you, but—I do, I *do*."

"That's enough, Eileen," said the quiet voice. "Try to forgive me if you can—and remember, I promise. But I called you up because there is a letter for you here. Victor Hardy, the man you were to marry, has written you . . . I am forwarding the letter. But in justice to me, please do not receive him until I have seen you. I have a most important reason for asking this—not a selfish one. There are some things which you must know."

"A letter from Victor?" was Eileen's only answer. In spite of herself her voice vibrated with joy.

"Yes," said Dr. Gray, "you will do what I ask?"

Assenting reluctantly, mainly because she could not escape feeling that her husband had the moral right to make this stipulation, hate him as she might, she said good-by.

Victor wrote what was frankly a love-letter. Eileen —poor Eileen!—read it over and over. He asked forgiveness, as Alistair had. Men seemed always wanting forgiveness, thought Eileen. What was there to forgive?

Alistair had guessed correctly. Victor begged to come to see Eileen once more—she was his—she had always belonged to him!

Eileen threw down the letter. The vision of Victor had never been more vividly present. It was as if she had never parted from him. Every impulse was a wild desire to go to him—to go straight to her lover! After all, why should *she* keep vows that the other Eileen had made to Alistair Gray? But—she had promised! The little figure paced up and down the long room, thinking, thinking. The soft, satin skirts that clung around her, the very pins in her red-brown hair, belonged to that other Eileen.

She delayed answering Victor's letter, and tried by every device to divert her thoughts, which were becoming unbearable. But the books she started to read were all half-remembered, and she could hear Victor's voice in every sentence. His presence echoed through her music. And once she came across the old waltz:

"Your dream-love,
Wait for her;
She'll—be—true—"

It was a fresh copy—that other Eileen must have known the song. It seemed so; yet no hateful memory of the gray eyes and gray hair of the half-seen man arose now when she played it. It reminded Eileen only of Victor.

In the morning—when honor seems more real and love less seductive—she wrote to Victor. She held herself in check, saying nothing of her love; she told him simply he must not come to see her. She must have time to think and decide. But she forgave him—if there was anything to forgive. Eileen took the letter to the mail-box at the gate. It was not until she touched the lace at her breast and found it wet that she realized she had been crying.

Victor answered immediately. He would not come till Eileen said that he might—and he loved her. That was nearly all. He did not write, somehow, quite the way she expected. The phrases and his use of words jarred upon her acute sense of fitness. But that is a common enough thing. He loved her! That atoned for all.

So Eileen waited and thought and agonized. For a fortnight she alternated between a wild desire to see Victor, and a chill feeling that nothing mattered much after all; that dull half-living was the best that could happen to her. At least both men had given her the

same promise. She need not expect either one until she summoned him. Then a tumult of emotion overwhelmed her and with a sob she made a prayer: "Oh God, let him come—only just once more! I will be so good—I will be so fair—I won't let him kiss me—I won't even let him touch me. I'll be very cold, very careful, only send him, dear God; please send him!"

It was not, however, either of her lovers that God—or any one—sent. Only an old man whom she remembered dimly, a spare old gentleman in a quaint caped coat, who tied a buggy outside—surely no one used buggies any more, even in this strange part of the country!—and asked, seeing her wandering aimlessly in the garden, if he might come in.

"I think I know you," she said, feeling as if she might trust him, though she could not remember who he was.

"I think you do," he said, smiling, and entering. "I am your clergyman, Dr. Blanton, and very truly at your service, my dear."

"Jessie said—" she began, and then stopped. She did not want to commit herself, if this nice old gentleman did not know of her lapse of memory.

"Jessie said I knew about everything? She was quite right," said he calmly, cutting the knot of her difficulties. "And I know that things will straighten themselves out, if you only give them time."

The feeling of knowing him was so strong that she spoke eagerly, intimately. After all, she must know him, behind that puzzling veil which had dropped over

the last eight years. The feeling of trust and friendship was surely a good enough guide to go by. And she was so in need of help!

"Oh, what shall I do?" she said impulsively.

"Just what you're doing," he said gently. "Wait."

"But—if you know—"

"It's hard. But somehow, I don't believe it's as hard as it seems."

"Not now," she said. "They have both promised to stay away till—till I can think, and remember—or even decide."

"Don't try too hard to come to a decision," said the strange old man who after all seemed so little strange. "Let the decision come to you. I am nearly sure that it will, and I have seen a great many things happen."

She wondered if he knew how she longed for Victor, how Victor's face came before her all the time, and his love seemed to be the one thing in the world she must have. . . . No. Old people couldn't know those things. But he was kind, and having him there felt like help, some way. They talked a little longer before he drove away.

He turned at the gate.

"I'm going to do what some people may think is a very wrong thing, Eileen," he said. "I am going to advise a man against his conscience. . . ."

She wondered what he meant, until the next day. Then she knew.

She was pacing up and down the garden, the next night, and she saw a man standing by the gate again.

Not Dr. Blanton, this time. The vivid face, the quick-moving figure that had haunted her ever since her awakening.

"Victor!" said her heart; her lips were struck dumb.

"I will not come in unless you say I may," he said in the swift, pleading voice she remembered so well. He leaned across the gate, his brilliant dark eyes searching hers. "It's so long, Eileen! I have broken my promise, to come. . . . Won't you give me back the rest of it and let me in?"

What was it she had promised—to be very calm, very cold, very careful? For she was neither. She had his hands in hers before she knew it.

"Oh, I have wanted you so!" she said.

"Then you do forgive me? You do love me yet? You do remember me?"

The words hurried on in the old swift way so well remembered. He drew her close to him. It seemed so right and so natural! And yet through all *something* far back in Eileen's brain urged to be heard. She must go back to Alistair—there was some good reason she should remember. But it was all so dim and confused—this man with his arms around her was the only real thing in the world.

"I don't think I ever really forgot you," she whispered. "Everything I have touched or done, even in this house, had had you written all over it. It was just as if you had been with me always—always! and you know—oh, no matter what I seemed to do I know I always loved just you."

Walking towards a little bench, they sat down together. Eileen felt steadier now and drew away a little.

"But I have a right to what they have left me of my youth!" she told herself fiercely. "Nobody can blame me for that other Eileen's doings."

Her lover laid his hand on hers. How well she remembered the warm protectiveness of that hand!

"Your dream-love,
Wait for her;
She'll—be—true—"

"Do you ever think of that thing you used to sing for me? You were my dream-love always."

"But if that is true," the angry thought came, even with his arm about her, "if that is true, why did he marry that other woman?" A host of questions rose to her mind. He had married first. But it would spoil the hour for her to question now. There was plenty of time.

The wonderful night was full of gentle murmurs and the perfume of flowers, and Eileen was happy for the first time since she had found herself. After all, who is to blame for anything? Perhaps even Alistair might have a just excuse. She shivered. She did not want to think of that other Eileen's husband, whose ring was on her finger. She took away her hand.

"It—isn't right," she said. "I shouldn't be here with you."

He laughed.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, what could be more right?"

"It isn't right," again she protested helplessly like a child. Her eyes filled with tears. "Please go," she said, "I was wrong to let you come."

"Why wrong?" he asked. "You are going to belong to me again, surely, Eileen?"

She leaned wearily against him.

"I am so tired, and it is so hard to do right! Please go now—dearest!"

"But I may come again, and you will have decided?" he said, his hands closing upon hers, and his bright, dark eyes looking down into hers swimming with tears. "To-morrow night, Eileen. You can decide by to-morrow night, easily." He rose and went toward the gate. "I know now that you will make the right decision," he said gently, "and that it will be for me."

And Eileen watched him go swiftly down the road, *as she could remember watching him many, many times before.* Then she went back to the house to lie awake thinking till dawn. Divorce, yes, that was the way out, she decided. A divorce could be obtained somewhere, of that she was fairly sure. Even juries had heard enough of such cases as hers to believe her and free her. Or perhaps Alistair Gray would relinquish his claim. He had been kind to her—he was being kind still. She lifted her eyes listlessly to the walls of the room. He was leaving her alone, certainly, in the midst of all these lovely things. And

Victor had not waited. It was only chance that his wife had died and left him free. But had he played fair in coming to her when she had asked him not to? Yet Victor's eager eyes and voice, and his ways that she knew so well and loved so well, had revived all the old love, and even more. A passionate yearning for him—that was something new—something that made her pulse beat faster—something that made nothing else matter.

And she knew then the answer she would give him the next night. In the morning she got up singing, refreshed as if she had slept the whole night through. That other man, Alistair Gray, whom she hated, had stolen for himself a wife—not a real woman. And whose fault was it if that other Eileen, that wife, had gone back into the unreal from whence she came? There was nothing left of her now but these fineries that the real Eileen was wearing, and the expression of wisdom she had noted in the hand mirror.

She ran to the cheval glass between the windows of her room. No, thank God, that look was gone! She was Eileen Arden again, with the wondering eyes—once again a girl—and Victor's. The wistful voice deep down in her subconscious self that wanted to be heard whispered for a moment, and then that too was gone.

"I will never dream of Alistair Gray any more," she rejoiced. It was all over; she had no more scruples or fears. There was nothing to do now but wait till

her lover's slim, erect figure came in sight down the road in the moonlight.

And so at nearly the same hour as before he came. She was watching for him. Eileen had chosen a soft, green gown to wear. "He will like this," she thought, puzzling with the half-memory again. He had liked it, or one like it, long ago. Oh, everything would come back soon!

He wasted no words this time when he reached her.

"The decision, Eileen?" he said, holding out his arms. He seemed so confident and he was smiling.

"I think—I belong to you," she said, in a low voice.

He caught her in his arms hungrily.

"Let us go in," he said finally. "You will not seem really mine again until you have let me in."

Into another man's house? She wondered—yet without a word she followed him through the French window. One of the maids was standing in the hall. With a gesture of authority he dismissed her and drew Eileen to a seat beside him on a couch.

"Thank Heaven, you have come back to me, little girl!" he said, with his arm close around her.

For a moment Eileen rebelled. He was taking everything so absolutely for granted! And she was committing herself to a course of action that she knew was dangerous and disloyal.

"Don't you think that—" It was so difficult to go on, and she faltered and began again. "Don't you think it is wrong to leave Alistair Gray without seeing him—without telling him of—of—our love—that I

never really gave myself to him—that I am yours—and—"

He caught her to him with a cry almost of terror. "Eileen, dear—Eileen!"

"What is it?" she gasped, terrified in turn by the note of fear in his voice.

He put her a little way from him, and held her so, with his hands on her shoulders.

"Is it worse than we thought?" he muttered to himself. "Child, who am I?"

For a moment the world seemed to be going to pieces around her.

"Isn't there any you?" she gasped. "Have I been mad and imagined it all—was there no Victor I was going to marry; was there no Alistair Gray who married me? Oh, whoever you are, tell me—tell me what is true!"

"That is all true," he said. "There was a Victor you were going to marry—there was an Alistair who married you. But answer—who do you think I am?" He spoke with a passionate anxiety, his eyes burning down into hers.

"Aren't—you—Victor?" she stammered, scarcely able to articulate.

"My poor little girl!" he said, drawing her to him again, "I am your husband. I'm Alistair Gray. Don't let go of yourself that way, Eileen. Don't faint, it's true."

She caught at her throat.

"But I took you for—but who was the man in the

doorway that day I awakened?" she implored. "I saw him—the gray man."

He held her tighter.

"Good Heavens, Eileen, that was Doctor Blanton! You have seen him since. But I was close behind him. Didn't you see me at all?"

"I fainted," she said wonderingly.

He touched her hair soothingly.

"Poor little woman! Have you been thinking all this time that that half-seen glimpse of Blanton was I? It seems incredible; yet it was perfectly natural after all. But—to have thought me that old lover of yours!" There was a half-note of vexation in his voice. "How did you come to saddle me with his name?"

Eileen, still in his arms, leaned her head on her husband's shoulder and thought.

"I remembered that I was going to marry him," she answered slowly. "It was all dim and faded. And the love for you in my heart, Alistair, and the picture of you printed on all those years of my life must have been so strong that they fused with the name of the man I thought I loved. I can't remember that face at all. Do you know what he looked like?"

"I have seen him," said Alistair quietly. "He had fair hair and blue eyes—rather a saintly type. A good boy. I didn't court you till he'd been married a year, dearest. I didn't think I was wronging you."

"Oh, don't be humble, Alistair; it isn't like you. You see, I'm remembering now a little. Yes; I do

remember that face, I think. I'm sorry he wants me again, but—" she laughed lightly—"he really isn't entitled to me. I'm glad it was he who kept his promise to stay away, not you. Well, he doesn't matter now one way or the other—"

"There is something else for you to remember," he told her presently. But she was not frightened, for he was smiling. What else could possibly happen that was not so? Eileen wondered.

"Yet there is something," she thought, with a shade of perplexity knitting her forehead, "something that I should remember. Something that held me to you," she said aloud. "Oh, how wonderful that you should be *you.*"

"Try to think, my dear," he said, with his eyes on hers. "I want you to remember for yourself. *Think.* Do you remember your room at home? Think of the door that opens from it."

"Yes," she said obediently, "yes; a door—beside the window that opened west—" Her brows knit again in the effort of recollection.

"You are remembering," he said. "I knew it would come of itself, if—if I could but have sufficient patience."

"Poor—Alistair!" she said, and the name seemed familiar and dear now. "Was it hard?"

"Never mind that, dear. Try to remember," he said again. "The door was on the west. Yes; and when you opened that door—"

"I—am—remembering," she faltered, her face white

and her hands clenching on his, "in the corner is—a—draped thing. We were waiting—Alistair, Alistair, I remember now!" She sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing. "That was why. Where is it? Where is our baby? Is it safe? Is it alive? *Alistair!*"

"Safe—alive—" he said. "You were delirious for five weeks after he came. Then when you woke you did not remember—"

She clung to him with terror in her eyes.

"Take me back to him, take me to-night! Oh, Alistair, if I had not remembered!"

"You were bound to remember," he said. "I knew—

"My dream-love,
Wait for her;
She'll—be—true—"

"Can you remember singing it to me?"

"To *you?*"

"Why, yes," he said marveling.

"Then it was all you—only you always! Oh, I *am* true, Alistair. Can you forgive me?"

ADJUSTMENT

It seems a thousand years away now, instead of the short years it is, the time when the officers' dances went on, let alone had just begun. Yet the time was when they were a new thing, and you went to them feeling partly thrilled and partly, unless you had a missionary instinct, not quite decorous. The girls with missionary instincts, of course, went complacently, talking largely about being kind to the poor lonely boys. But Cecilia Burden, when she went, and changed her whole life thereby, felt neither like a missionary nor a gay adventurer. She felt like a girl who had done a very foolish and not quite excusable thing. She was always ashamed of herself when her loneliness won out over her pride.

She had always been a peculiarly lonely person; none the less so because most people considered her very fortunate. Her father and mother had died when she was very little, leaving her well off. There had been no relatives near enough to feel that they should take the little girl into their home. A conscientious but uninterested second cousin had seen to it that she was kept in excellent schools; and she herself had insisted on ending her education in college instead of being fashionably "finished." Nobody but herself knew why she did it. And she did not always admit

the reason even to herself. It was really because she had hoped secretly and desperately that college would give her some friend more genuine and devoted than the fashionable schools afforded; some one who could give her a peephole or perhaps a doorway into a home. All her life she had been starved for home life, for some one who really belonged to her. But she hoped that nobody knew it, quite as hard as she hoped it could happen.

She was tall and fair and proud-looking; a girl who gave an impression of having everything life could give, and desiring nothing more. And the pride that iced over her loneliness might have gone on thickening all her days if it had not been for the war.

The year before the war's end moved her, even as it did every one else in America. She felt herself carried forward by the prevailing impetus of friendliness, of comradeship with every one. Her wall of shyness and lonely pride melted ever so little; and so it was that when she heard an acquaintance at a formal dinner lamenting her unfilled quota of girls for an officers' dance one night, she had courage to lean across a couple of people and volunteer, even with eagerness. She really wanted to go; she wanted the fun and the excitement of it, and the contact with the men. There would be men there whom she had never seen before and need never see again; men who would be friends for the moment, and with whom there would be no necessity of—just what, she would not formulate to herself. The unformulated feeling was really that

they could not think she wanted them. It was a little morbid streak that had grown in her because in her heart she knew that her only way to the things she wanted lay through marriage. Because of this secret knowledge she had more and more terror of seeming to make advances, even of the merest friendliness, to men.

Mrs. Hallett looked a little surprised when perfectly gowned, perfectly poised Miss Burden volunteered to fill in her quota of damsels; Cecilia didn't seem that sort of girl. You could better imagine her efficiently running committees. But she needed Cecilia, and accepted her eagerly and gratefully. And in an hour from then Cecilia found herself taking Mrs. Hallett and three chattering girls down to the clubrooms where the officers waited. She felt ashamed of herself already, and very alien.

"I hope it will be a good night," one of the girls confided to her, feeling for a rouge-pad. "You know, they run the queerest way—one night you have a perfectly grand time, and the next they're as stupid as can be. Never been before? Oh, you'll like it. The best way's to come regularly, and make dates over."

The girl, a little yellow-haired thing clad exquisitely in deep blue velvet, chattered on, and Cecilia answered her just enough for courtesy. She felt more and more chilled. After all, was it her sort of thing? Were not the staid dinners and dances of the people she knew, devoid as they were of any chance of novelty or adventure, where she really belonged? But she went to

the dressing-room and down to the long dancing-rooms with the rest, holding her head all the higher because she felt so ashamed of having come on an impulse.

The band was excellent, and the dancing had already begun. Her chaperon introduced her quickly to a couple of shy midshipmen, and she whirled out on the floor with one of them. He would have liked better, she was sure, the little yellow-haired thing who had chattered to her on the way down; but at least he was respectful. Indeed, he was so in awe of her he scarcely spoke. The adventure was not exciting so far.

Her second partner was a gay Southerner, who flattered her mechanically and cheerfully through two sweeping and too-close-held dances, then abandoned her eagerly for a little girl he had made a date with, he said, last time.

"Mighty nice kids you can pick up at these dances sometimes," he added reflectively; and Cecilia felt annoyed at his too-patronizing tone. After that she tried to sit out. But in those early and strenuous days the chaperons wouldn't let you. She was forced on a big dark Captain of Infantry who scarcely spoke, to her relief, for their first round of the room. Then he looked down at her, and, as if something he saw suddenly waked him into friendship, began to talk—began in the very middle of things, pouring out his feelings as only naturally repressed people ever do. He had not talked to any one, he said, for half a year.

"I like you," he went on in a tone removed from

rudeness by its detached sincerity. "You're the first woman I've seen to-night that I haven't felt miles away from. And I'm—I've simply got to let out to somebody. We mayn't see each other again—won't, probably. Do you mind if I act as if I knew you awfully well, and let loose and tell you things?"

Cecilia shook her head. Her heart beat a little faster. So there were other lonely people in the world.

"We may never meet again," she echoed. "Say what you want to."

That was the beginning of everything. Naturally, they met again in two days, and six weeks after that they had married. Things went swiftly in the days of the Great War.

He was of her own kind and class, and like her, without kith or kin except for one little old cousin in Delaware. He was one of the big, silent men who veil high-strung nerves under a seeming steadiness and stolidity. His straight-looking brown eyes and rather heavy, regular-featured face covered, Cecilia learned before she had seen him three times, a sensitiveness and loneliness greater than her own. In spite of the swiftness of the affair, neither of them had any doubts that they were doing right. And there was no time to doubt on the honeymoon. He went over within a month and ten days after they were married, with the memory of five weeks of absolute happiness.

Cecilia lived, when he had gone, with the old cousin he had told her of in the South; a gentle, fluttering old lady who admired her and petted her in the pleasantly

articulate fashion of her kind. The two of them got on well and, after Cecilia had recovered from the first wrench of parting, were very content. The girl had not been a wife long enough to make Lawrence's society so much a habit that she actually suffered from any gap in her life. Her very real affection for him simply made her build her life, with an abandon which she scarcely herself realized, out toward the time of his return. He, and his coming, came to mean to her the fulfilment of all that she had ever missed; he meant to her the home she had never known, the love she had needed so long and so intensely. Presently she found that there was to be a child, and she was almost entirely happy. She lived now in the dream of Lawrence and the child and the home of the future. It came to be, though she did not know it, less love of her husband than of all he would bring her. And time went, and the baby came; and Cecilia, caring for it and writing and receiving long, ecstatic letters, surrounded by the soft devotion of little old Cousin Lorena, knew more happiness than she had thought existed; but still a happiness founded on what was to come, rather than what was.

It was a quiet life enough; Cousin Lorena had a round of mild elderly society: a sewing-circle which had been meeting undisturbed since the youth of its members thirty years since, an old beau or so who still called punctiliously in his rounds among the "girls" whom he had known for the same length of time; accustomed attendance at old Dr. Blanton's church,

where the sermons were long and gentle and rambling, and full of "literary allusions": drives in a carriage with a horse which, though probably not contemporary with the rest of Cousin Lorena's friends, seemed to be. There were younger people, but Cecilia did not seem to care to bother.

And then came the armistice; and, presently, news that Lawrence was coming home.

"I can scarcely wait to see you," he wrote. "It seems as if it were forever. . . When I think of getting back to you and our baby it seems like a piece of Heaven. . . ."

Finally the cable came, with the exact date of his arrival. It would be in New York. Cecilia was in Delaware.

"We'll see him! We'll see him soon! You shall have your father as soon as I can take you to New York, you darling!" she chanted to the baby of her adoration, bending over him and lifting him up to kiss.

"Cecilia, darlin'!" said old Cousin Lorena's soft voice, a little troubled and remonstrant. "You won't take that baby, will you, all the way to the city, with the change of climate an' all? I think yo' husband comes first."

Cecilia wheeled, aghastly, the baby in her arms; and at the sudden motion he began to cry.

"He's like Lawrence—awful nervous," warned old Cousin Lorena, undaunted. "An' I don't think you should take so young an infant so far."

"Not show him to his father? Why, Lawrence is wild to see him. I couldn't lose a minute showing him the baby."

Cousin Lorena, little and frail against the enormous old-fashioned bureau in the nursery, looked troubled still.

"Leave him with me, darling," she urged. "He's a bottle baby; it won't be any trouble. An' then you an' Lawrence can have your lovely reunion like lovers."

Cecilia found herself more impatient with dear little Cousin Lorena than she had ever been since they lived together. What an impossible combination of sentimentality and expediency these old-fashioned ladies were! And anyway, Cousin Lorena didn't know about being married. And probably it was just that she wanted the baby. Cecilia did not realize how fiercely she adored her baby, nor how near he was to blotting out everything else in her life. She was a woman of strong emotions, who had never thought much about them, nor admitted to them more than she could help.

At all events, she cabled back joyously to Lawrence, and spent every moment before her departure in buying pretty things for the baby. She was so absorbed in it that she forgot to pack half her own pretty clothes.

When the time came she took Maynard and his nurse and traveled to New York, where she engaged a suite in a hotel and waited impatiently for the transport to return.

She found herself sitting in the waiting-room at the actual hour it docked, her heart beating violently. She had to sit still, because of little Maynard, asleep in her arms. She could hear tramplings and laughter and exclamations in the next room, that room where Lawrence must be. One of the voices she heard might be his. Would the physical examination never be over? . . . The noises went on; she could hear doctors giving orders, the heavy footsteps of men, a good deal of swearing and a little laughter. Other women waited around her. She could not bear to speak to them; her whole being was too tense with expectancy.

The door opened four times, and men came hurriedly through, looking about eagerly for their womenfolk; each time Cecilia's heart leaped, then subsided with a sick disappointment. The baby, affected by her tension, finally began to whimper. Presently she became absorbed in soothing him.

It was then, as luck would have it, that Lawrence entered and looked about for her. Her head was bent down over the child, and he did not know her immediately. He stared about him impatiently, walked through the room a couple of times in search of her, before either saw the other. Then it was she who looked up, and they saw each other.

He caught her in his arms then, kissing her openly and hungrily, careless of the waiting people about them. She clung to him closely, scarcely believing

that it was true, for a minute, or real, so suddenly it had all happened. The baby, more roughly touched than before in all his adored months, began to cry.

Lawrence jerked back and raised his head, and Cecilia got her first good look at him. He was a little heavier than when he went away; but nevertheless he did not look so well. He was pale under his tan, and the lines of his face sagged.

"Can't you make that child stop?" he demanded sharply; and then, seeing her shocked look, caught himself up penitently. "I didn't mean to sound so cross, darling. He was so close, and he made such a surprising noise. They—they all cry, don't they?"

He smiled down at her. For a moment he was the old Lawrence. Cecilia had been chilled and jarred, but she smiled back, reassured.

"They *do,* once in awhile. This baby of ours has never cried much till now. I suppose I shouldn't have brought him down here with me to-day. But I did want to show him to you."

"This baby of ours! Lord, that sounds wonderful!" said her husband fervently; and the last touch of chill faded from Cecilia's heart. He was going to love the baby; just as he had said in the letters.

"Back with you! and all that hellish time over for good. This *is* like a dream!" Lawrence began, dropping in the nearest settee and pulling Cecilia to him, when they had entered their rooms. "Oh, gosh, I forgot that baby! Do you wear him all the time? Put it away, won't you, darling, and talk to me? And

tell me what shows there are in town. We'll celebrate —what do you say?"

There was a nurse, fortunately. Cecilia rose, with the baby, who had begun to whimper faintly again at Lawrence's unfamiliar touch, and took him in to the room where he slept. She felt faintly chilled, again. Lawrence seemed so different from what she remembered him to be. But she went back to him, and discussed theaters with him.

Things went along gayly for a couple of days. Having Lawrence back, and hurrying about from gaiety to gaiety with him was delightful at first. But—there was the baby. It fretted her secretly that her husband did not seem interested in him, and was frankly irritated when he cried. And, whether Cecilia admitted it to herself or not, to her the baby came first. It was hers, after all, and had been hers nearly a year. She'd only had a few weeks of Lawrence. She did not realize this herself, really. She was not much given to thinking things out.

Lawrence's demands continued to be many, and to detach Cecilia more and more from her much-valued baby. He seemed tired, yet thirsty for change, for amusement, for fresh things and faces. Cecilia did not want any of these things in her heart. The home, the ordered routine of a house, a husband and child—children, perhaps—were what she wanted, what she waited for impatiently. She had wanted these things all her life. She had believed that they would be hers with Lawrence's return. And now they were ap-

parently as far away as ever. One night at a dance she asked him, point-blank, why he cared so much more for this sort of thing than for the life they had planned before he left.

He did not seem to feel that she was reproaching him. He only laughed a little as he explained.

"Well, we feel we need a little pay for all we've gone through," he told her. "The fuss people make over us is nothing to the way the French worship the poilus. . . . Seems to me people over here don't care an awful lot about it all—well, I suppose they weren't where they knew about it. Even you, darling—"

Cecilia flushed up with hurt pride, and stayed carefully away from him for the rest of the evening. So all he wanted was to be fêted! She thought of the staid, responsible Lawrence she had known, and wondered what awful thing the war had done. And she stayed away from him for the rest of the evening, which unfortunately for her plan of punishment he did not seem to mind.

The nurse met them on their return with the news that little Maynard seemed ill. Cecilia rushed into his room in a flurry of satin and laces, angry at herself for going away from him, and at Lawrence for taking her. She stayed up the rest of the night, rather unnecessarily, with her baby. She thought of it as her baby only now. A slow anger was mounting in her at Lawrence. She did not show it, she thought. But she insisted coldly on his going on with his gaieties. She herself stayed up most of the night hours with her

baby, who seemed no better and no worse as time went on, simply fretful and restless and pulled down. And he cried more continuously than even Cecilia had thought any baby could cry. The doctor said that the child would be all right when he got back to the air and water he was accustomed to. As a matter of fact he would get acclimated to New York, if she would have patience, and keep him outdoors as much as possible.

Lawrence showed no sign of wishing to let up in his round of engagements. He did show signs of growing irritation with the baby's continuous wailings. And Cecilia continued to hold on to herself, though with a growing feeling of hopelessness. She clung to the hope ahead, of the time when they should go back home, and things should straighten out, and the baby get well and happy and rosy again, and Lawrence go back to his business and settle into the routine of life with her. She thought that if he said, "Good Lord, can't you stop that child?" once more, she would go to pieces.

She was walking up and down the room with the child, feeling that she could not be patient much longer without at least one outburst of frankness—and also that she had been far too patient as it was—patting it mechanically to make it stop whimpering. And as she walked and thought and patted Lawrence walked into the room, a note in his hand.

"Cecilia," he said abruptly, "I can't stand the way that child howls much longer. I'm going down to

Baltimore to a house party I've been asked to. I know God alone could separate you from that baby, so the only thing I can suggest is that you take him back to Cousin Lorena's."

Cecilia stopped short, staring at him with a dreadful cold feeling about her heart. So this was the end!

It fell on her from an absolutely clear sky. It had never dawned on her that Lawrence, in spite of his altered ways, was anything but devoted to her underneath. It had never occurred to her that he would deliberately do so inexcusable a thing as he planned. He did not love her, apparently. That he did not love the baby had been sinking into her consciousness bitterly for a week.

She said nothing. She merely continued her mechanical movement of soothing the crying child, staring at her husband over his little contorted face.

"You don't care a bit for me," he half accused, half defended, in the way that was so unlike the good, responsible, courteous man she had married. "You only care for that screaming child. It hasn't made the least difference to you that he was driving me mad."

"Neither of us will ever annoy you again," was all she found to say, speaking with difficulty through stiff lips. She felt frozen and heavy all over, and as if she were going through some horrible thing in a dream. She dimly heard him telling her in a half-frightened voice not to take it so seriously, not to act

that way about it—but she could not answer him. She merely put out one repelling hand, then turned and went away from him to the farthest room of their suite. She felt in that moment of dull and frightened anger, of the world going to pieces around her, that she never wanted to see or speak to Lawrence again. She felt, too, that this was the end.

He came in several times while she was packing, and tried to speak to her, to explain, but she simply shook her head. He seemed a thousand miles away from her.

She clung all the more fiercely to her baby, as she went on her way down, back to Cousin Lorena's. The nurse might as well not have been along, for all the care she needed to take of it. Waking or sleeping, Cecilia never let it out of her sight. Over the little whimpering thing her eyes would stare unseeingly ahead, and she would think and think and think, in circles that took her back just where she had begun.

So this was the end of her married life—the life that she had thought would make up to her for everything she had ever starved for, in her long, mute loneliness. This was the end—nothing left but the baby. And he was going to be a man too, some day, a man who might break her heart and disappoint and disillusion her. . . . She was the kind of woman, apparently, who could not hold a man. . . . How much love did Lawrence have for her, if a crying baby could make him turn and go away from her that way? What sort of despicable person was he?

Sitting in the train calmly, her clear-cut, pale face a quiet mask, her mind flung itself despairingly from phase to phase of her problem . . . though why she considered it a problem she did not know. She felt subconsciously that there was more to it—that there was a key, if she only knew it; some way out at least with self-respect. She could not respect herself, as it was, and she knew she hated and despised Lawrence. And the worst of it was—she loved him, she knew that now that they were parted in a way that made reunion very unlikely. She loved him more than she did the baby. And he—he had cared so little for her that he'd left her because he didn't like to hear the baby cry! . . .

"No, he won't come back," she said to herself with a dreadful certainty.

She sat on, feeling very young and lost and alone; very wrecked. She did not want the baby as much as she wanted her husband. . . . Her husband was not worth wanting. . . . She had lost her chance of keeping him on account of the baby. . . . But the baby was all she had. . . .

She was too proud to do very much explaining to Cousin Lorena. She did a little—enough to make the little fluttering old lady's face turn paler, and to make her hesitate a little before she answered naturally. But she did answer naturally. Cousin Lorena was a sport; you had to admit that.

"Lawrence has gone to a house-party," was all Cecilia said. "So far as I could discover, he didn't

want me and the baby along. He suggested that we —leave him and come down here."

"My dear child!" was all Cousin Lorena said. "But there, I know how things are. It hurt your feelings a little, I can see that. . . . Well, there, we won't talk about it."

Which was exactly what Cecilia had wished for, but had not dared to hope. There was no use, if it could be avoided, going into things with Cousin Lorena. She was only going to stay with her a few days, anyway; just long enough to give little Maynard a chance to pick up, and to pack up her own things. She had got no further in her plans than return to New York, and a temporary stay at some hotel, while she could make new plans. For the baby's sake it would be better to find a place in the country. . . . She must think of the baby, and nothing else. . . . This was, of course, not possible. She thought of Lawrence and her own tragedy all day long; and if she managed to forget for a little while by day, at length, she dreamed about it all night.

Cousin Lorena assumed, both to her and to the people about, that Lawrence would follow his wife and child in a few days. Cecilia was wild to be off herself, and end the tension, but the baby, after a couple of days' health, began to fret again. It was partly in sympathy with her own unhappiness, no doubt. The doctor said it was also because the journey had upset him. It would be a couple of weeks at least before he could travel.

Cecilia felt that she simply could not stand any more of all this; the gentle inquiries as to what she had heard from her husband, the pleasant stories of his boyhood, the general atmosphere of being Lawrence's wife still. She wanted to go where she could forget about it all till the wound was less raw. Dr. Blanton who had a habit of pastoral visits which must have kept him driving about all day, so far as she could see, curiously enough was the only exception to the flood of reminiscence. Whether it was that he was too absent-minded to remember that remarks about a husband were the correct thing to offer a young wife, or that his interest in his own conversation, which was generally about things he had read in books no one else had ever heard of, prevented him from thinking of other people, Cecilia could not tell, but she rather thought it was the latter. But because of his obliviousness to everything but impersonalities, she began to cling to him more than she knew. He called on Cousin Lorena with a frequency that made Cecilia, wrapped as she was in her own trouble, begin to wonder if he had "intentions." But she, Cecilia, always found herself drifting down to where they sat with palm-leaf fans, exchanging bits of amusing anecdotes, usually, one found, about people long-dead, but still discussed with friendly laughter and affection.

The old parlor was very dim and cool, and one afternoon Cecilia established herself in a rocker there with the baby, who seemed fretful anywhere but out

of her arms. He had fallen asleep, finally, and she, tired with the sudden and unseasonable heat, fell asleep too—the light sleep mothers know, holding the baby fast.

She was in an alcove, where she could neither see nor be seen. If she rose she would wake the baby, who had not had much sleep the night before. So when the low murmur of voices awoke her, she sat where she was. It was only old Dr. Blanton, calling as usual. Cecilia smiled to herself in lazy amusement. Well, if he did "co't" Cousin Lorena, both of them would marry nice enough people. Kind people, if a little—could one call it remote? Nø, remote was not the word (the thoughts glided sleepily through her mind, lulled to a pleasant daze by the afternoon sleep) for their childlike chattering interest in men and girls long buried or grandparents. Dim, rather. Like a quaint old painting of conventionalized people. She wondered, as she wakened more, and roused to her wonted bitterness, what either of them would do or say if she hurled her raw problem at them. Tell her that people didn't *do* such things, doubtless, to quote Ibsen—they'd probably just about heard of him, down here. Well, she wouldn't hurl it. It was good to sit here in the shaded light, watching the glass drops swinging in the light breeze from the chandelier, and a stray waver of sunlight playing on the dulled gilt flowers of the wall-paper: hearing the pleasant, unhurried elderly voices talking of things which had ceased to matter thirty years gone. If she listened perhaps

it would keep her from thinking about Lawrence for a little while.

". . . No, my dear Miss Lorena, for once your memory is at fault! It was not Aunt Jenny Lou; she was older. It was Aunt India."

"Yes; I was wrong. They called her the White Rose of Germantown, I remember my mother saying. She married a Pennsylvanian, if I remember aright. It *was* she who was painted as Di Vernon in the Walter Scott album."

"Yes, she was the one. She was only about ten years older than I. I can remember her, at the close of the war, a very beautiful young woman."

"Ah, there were knights in those days!" said Miss Lorena's gentle little thrilled voice. "She was the one. He wore her glove pinned to his hat through everything; and when it was carried off by a stray shot he rode back into the mêlée and risked his life to get it. And he wasn't even one of our own Southern young men! It is a wonderful story, Dr. Blanton. I have always loved it."

"I can remember when he came back from war, though." Dr. Blanton was off on one of his interminable tales. But the thin old voice was pleasant in Cecilia's ears, and she listened idly. "But I don't remember the glove. He came to get her in my grandparents' house, where she had waited for him; they had just been married before the last year of the war, you know. I can remember the excitement; Aunt India had been shopping. Shopping was a state matter

then. She and grandmother had discussed what he should see her in first, by the day. Finally they bought a green silk, because he liked her best in green; and they made it up. I can see it now. I think I was a bit jealous of Uncle Jacob; I adored Aunt India, and I must have tried to learn her looks by heart, that evening when they expected him. It had white lace low over her shoulders, and sprays of white artificial roses catching it up in loops. He had written how he longed to see her in all her silken beauty. That was what he called it—silken beauty. Good heavens, how young he would seem to me now! He couldn't have been more than twenty-three: she was a good deal younger than that. Then, of course, he seemed a thousand years old and seven feet high. . . . He *was* tall, and very handsome. Drooping mustache and big dark eyes; eyes like the ones they had in my boyhood seem to have gone out, in men and women both, by the way. I wonder why."

"I have noticed that, too," said Miss Lorena interestedly. "And gentlemen never seem to have color nowadays. I can remember my brothers; they all had such bright color. Gentlemen did then."

"Psycho-analysis would doubtless tell us," said Dr. Blanton scornfully. He did not like it much. "Ah, well. She waited alone in the parlor to meet him; and he came hurrying in. And when we heard, from the sitting-room, his voice, saying angrily, 'My God, how do you dare stand there in those costly garments, when I've been cutting off my boys' legs and arms while

they shrieked in anguish, for lack of money to buy them chloroform!' And then poor young Aunt India came running in to my grandmother with a look of horror on her face."

"Oh, dear me!" asked Miss Lorena's awed voice, "How dreadful—what was the matter?"

(Cecilia sat upright, her heart beating hard. She wanted to go and find that long dead girl, to put her arms around her and tell her that she too had been through the same agony and disillusion. . . . It was like her own story.)

By the sound of his voice Cecilia could tell that as Dr. Blanton answered he was smiling.

"I can still hear my grandmother's voice," he said. "She was a good woman and a strong one—too strong, I thought then, seeing her holding up poor hurt young Aunt India, and holding her shoulders and talking to her—sharp and loud, as you talk to some one you're trying to waken from a drug. 'India,' she said. 'Just hold on. Jacob's come back to you out of the dark ages. He's been at war, and when men have enough war they're not civilized for awhile, sometimes. Here he's back in civilized Germantown, and it's a jar. His nerves are all wrong: give him time, and he'll be all right again. Don't feel as if he really has sense about it. Give him a chance to adjust himself and it will come right.' "

"Oh, how terrible!" said Miss Lorena.

"Yes . . . in a way it was terrible. All things are that go with war. But my grandmother made her

realize what the matter was. Grandfather had been in the Mexican war, you see."

"Did it come right?" asked Miss Lorena. "Goodness, I hope things like that don't happen these days . . . but they couldn't, with all the modern inventions."

". . . But they have sought out many inventions," quoted Dr. Blanton. "I hope not—often, my dear Lorena. Yes . . . it was terribly hard for poor Aunt India for awhile, I think. But she went with him to their home, and I am sure that things straightened gradually out. At least, as I remember Uncle Jacob he was a very kind man, and loved her dearly. They were very happy together. I can see her now, in the green dress. . . ."

Cecilia sat on, swaying the baby unconsciously. He had waked, but for a wonder was quiet. The little rasping wail had fretted her more than she knew; its cessation was a relief. The old people were talking on; they had passed to Aunt Jenny Lou now.

"Dark ages— . . . his nerves . . . adjustment . . . give him time . . . he'll adjust. . . ."

And she hadn't known—and she hadn't known! Why—Lawrence wasn't a despicable wretch, after all—he was only a sick man! And she wasn't a woman whose marriage was a humiliating failure: she'd simply been ignorant. Life mightn't be a shipwreck after all. Things had a chance to come straight. And even if it was only a fighting chance, why—happiness for two people was worth fighting for. She rose from her

chair, her usually pale cheeks scarlet with excitement, and walked into the other part of the room, where Dr. Blanton and Miss Lorena swayed in their rockers, talking on.

"Cousin Lorena," she said, "I'm going to leave Maynard with you. I think I had better go down to Baltimore, where Lawrence is. Will you look after him?"

After Cousin Lorena had made her fluttered, yet efficient arrangements, and carried the baby upstairs with the pride of a child given a sacred trust, Cecilia looked at Dr. Blanton.

"I think that will be a very pleasant thing to do, my dear," was all he said. "I'm sure you'll be glad."

But Cecilia looked straight at him.

"You are quite right," she said, "and—thank you for explaining."

He looked back at her quite simply, and laughed his little kind, high laugh.

"My dear, you are a very good and intelligent girl," he said. "All you needed was to know."

THE LITTLE QUEENS OF DEATH

One month after Richard Maclane was invalided home from his relief work in Russia—one month after he brought her the little images—he broke his engagement with Valla Harfager.

It was not the sort of thing which was an ordinary happening in that little Main Line town. Most people there were more or less other people's cousins, or at least friends because their great grandfathers had been, and therefore every one took an interest in things that happened. It was felt that something ought to be done about it: Arden Garrison, the young rector, who had been Richard's close friend before he went away, was supposed to have tried to talk to him about it. His uncle, Dr. Blanton, being older, and one of those gentle souls whom it is difficult to snub, did. Even old Whitall, who, since he had taken over the mastership of the Green Valley Hounds rarely talked of much else, said "damn shame," not only to others, but to Richard Maclane himself. As for Richard, his face was more and more haggard, and he avoided Andrey Kerkoff, naturally, but he went desperately on his way. Some of the younger men said that they might have done the same thing. But it was an inexcusable thing from most viewpoints. He

and Valla had been friends and lovers since childhood; Valla was beautiful, good and charming.

It was because of that little devil of a Mary Bellamy, of course. He had the grace to be honest with Valla about that: though, indeed, it was hard to be otherwise than honest with Valla at any time. She was like that; still, strong, quiet, like Brunhild to look at, broad-shouldered, long-limbed, and crowned with yellow hair. The Harfagers had been Norse before they had been English, though they had been English for some centuries before they became Quakers and left with Penn for America. The thousand-year-old Norse strain showed strongly in them still. Valla was named, indeed, for one of these Valas—Wise Women—whom their tradition said had come from Norway as some wild chief's counselor. According to the tradition there had been more than one of these Valas; the prophetess strain had come down from mother to daughter, woman after yellow-haired, white-armed woman who had ridden by their chiefs in battle and prophesied to them in peace. She was like what they must have been. You could not think of her as being broken like other women, even by a grief like this.

Perhaps that was the trouble. If she could have let go and have wept and shuddered and implored, Richard might, even in his overwrought state, have dragged himself free of Mary's feverish, heady fascinations, and been held steady by the deep old things between him and Valla. But back of Valla were eleven generations of Friends, with their tradition of repres-

sion. He had no way of knowing, as she sat facing him with steady eyes on his, and a face that only whitened, did not change, that she felt as if she were going through a hard death. He believed, as many people who should know better believe, that to be a Friend is to have less capacity for emotion than the normal man or woman. And yet in those eleven generations because of whom Valla Harfager came to sit unshakenly before her immeasurable grief, there had been people who had done strange things because of a feeling in their heart. There had been prophetesses, yellow-haired, white-armed women of great houses, who had gone out to cry to the rabble of doom that should fall on them, because of the white fire in their hearts: who had let themselves be torn to pieces, smiling, when the doom fell. There had been gentlefolk born to lordship, who had wandered starving in desolate places for their belief's sake. There had been gray-eyed girls, almost children, of whom it was told that they had been taken from their mothers to be scourged through cruel New England towns: girls who had gone to hard deaths unmoved because of what they could see apportioned by God to their judges.

Valla, as she sat staring ahead of her at the little images Richard had given her, might have been one of those long dead, doom-bringing women. But Richard only saw her quietude, and heard the height of love and selflessness that was, as always, in her answer. It was a strange answer for a woman to

make, if she had not had the naked honesty of the Friends in her tradition and very fiber. A man less jaded and overworn would have felt the terrific power of her; but Richard was too wearied with all he had gone through to be touched by anything less overt than the whiplike stimulation of young Mary Bellamy's barren vividness and bright insolences. Mary was what the whole world had been in the years while she reached girlhood; living at fever-heat always, mad for the love and excitement of the moment. So he heard Valla untouched save by a feeling of guiltiness which was not strong enough to keep him from his desires.

"Of course I will release you, Richard," was what Valla said steadily. "That is, as far as you and I have anything to do with it. It is borne in on me, as things have sometimes been on people of my faith, that we belong with each other, and nothing you can think you wish, or I can grant, can really free us from one another, and that you will know it one day. I shall always belong to you. If you can belong to another woman, you are as far free as I can make you free."

The utter steadiness and utter love in her voice went all through him. For a moment he felt consciously the current of her power. Then another spell came back, the physical pull of Mary Bellamy's strong little bold hands and scarlet provocative lips and sweeping, insolent gaiety. He never remembered how the scene ended; only that presently he was gone, still hungry to be with Mary as a drunkard is hungry

for brandy, but with a hurting picture of Valla unshakably present to him; Valla, as he had seen her for one betraying moment after she thought he had gone, flung to her full height, her arms tossed above her head and her gray eyes as unseeing as her lips were drawn.

Of Valla, a moment later, bowed head on her tall mantel, with her outstretched hands unconsciously clenching the little images that were set at its ends, his last gift to her—the Little Queens of Death.

He did not know their names, or call them so to himself then, as he went away wretchedly to Mary Bellamy. It was Andrey Kerkoff, weeks later, who named them so to Valla; who named them so months later to more than Valla.

He was an exotic personality for that little quietly proud and provincial Pennsylvania town; more exotic than Mary Bellamy. The girls who were jealous of her said that the whole tangle was the sort of thing Mary enjoyed, for her vanity's sake, more than anything in the world; that if Kerkoff had not come there because he was Richard's friend, and she had not been engaged to him, the taking of Richard would not have amused her half so much, or been half so worth while. He had escaped from Russia, after suffering things that the normal Americans about him felt secretly were rather indecent to have done to you—too like the melodrama which normal people forget is as real as normality. Richard, with that impulsive generosity and lovableness of his, had financed Ker-

koff, helped him away, accredited him to friends in his own town, and even taken him to live in his house after his own return. Richard was his only tie in America.

In the two months he preceded Richard, he had been fascinated by Mary, and she had promised to marry him. There was something in the girl, young as she was—only seventeen, for all her decadence—that drew and was drawn by the overwrought, the abnormal. When she first met Kerkoff her court of college lads had been flung to the winds. To be sure Kerkoff, with his tall, drilled slimness and his slanting green eyes below a mop of curly hair, not to speak of his Guardsman manners, had moved most of her friends the same way. But the obvious nerve-shatteredness of him, the curious little jerky or tragic words and ways that had peeped out after the first, had repelled most of the other girls. He was "queer." Mary apparently had liked him for it, and the engagement was a fact accomplished when Richard came back. The fact that Kerkoff took everything harder than most men, had been through enough tragedy for two lifetimes already, and had pinned every bit of hope and faith and belief he had left to her and Richard, may not have occurred to her, or simply may not have mattered if it did. She thrust her greedy little baby-vamp hands deep into the web of things and was apparently rather amused at the horrible crash and tangle she made. Richard was too blind-

drunk with her to know very much but that she was his and he could marry her. He may have been the only man in the place who did not know that she had finished the wrecking of Andrey Kerkoff, horribly, spectacularly. It was rather unfair that the town at large was angrier at Mary on Valla's account than on Andrey's, for certainly Andrey was broken to bits, and Valla, for all the world could see, went steadily on her way.

And then the wildest thing of all came to be known. It is a tribute to the esteem her world held Valla in that nobody thought it in the least amusing. Only very superb on Valla's part and a little contemptible —if piteous—in Andrey's. Andrey Kerkoff spent practically every moment of his time with Valla Harfager.

It could not have been the easiest thing in the world for Valla to have him walking up and down her floor, raving about Mary. It must have been an added turn of the screw for her to hear about the other girl's unforgettable power and searing charm and wonderful kisses, and all the rest of the details poor Kerkoff's sick, love-hungry lips poured out by the hour. He was as past reserve as a man in delirium.

"Oh, my dear, why do you let that dreadful man come, and talk to you about things you'd better forget?" begged her mother, coming on Valla after one of these visits. The girl was lying back in her chair, just as Kerkoff had left her. She was quiet, as always;

but there were rings of exhaustion around her eyes, and her strong white hands lay laxly on the mahogany arms.

"I have a good deal of strength, and he has very little," said Valla's drawn lips. "If he did not have the relief of talking of it he might do something very wrong."

"You will have none too much if you keep on this way," said her mother. She was not herself of Quaker stock, but a pretty, demonstrative woman who laughed when she was happy, and cried out when she was hurt, and could never quite understand her husband and daughter.

Valla lifted herself in the chair, and seemed to drag her eyes away to look at her mother. She had been staring unseeingly at the little images Richard had given her.

"It's all I can do," she said simply. "Richard is shaken and unlike himself, and wrecked by the dreadful war-things: but they have wrenched him so far away from me that I cannot help him—yet. I can help this poor soul. It is the nearest I can come to doing something for Richard."

Her eyes went again to the little images.

They were heavily built little women carved of some dark wood, that had become darker by time. The carving was clumsy, like a child's: the painted eyes stared, and the thick lips, still faintly reddened, were set cruelly. They were not quite alike: one would say sisters. On each of the heads sat a crown, the

sort of crown chess-queens have: their arms were clenched back of them at their sides, as if on some invisible thing that nothing could let go. They had stiff, flaring wooden skirts. Except the crowns, there was no other semblance of ornament, but around their waists and wrists and shoulders were grooves, as if there had once been something there. Something—a breast-ornament perhaps—had been on the flat naked chests, painted a curious pied color: across half both sullen faces and arms were traces of dull blue. The rest might have been flesh color once on a time. They were grotesque, yet with all their clumsiness not laughable; sinister, somehow. A strange thing to bring home a girl from abroad; but Valla seemed to have had a strange fancy to them, from the first.

"You aren't taking this like a normal girl. In your place I should throw those hideous little dolls out of the window, say Richard was a good riddance, and come to Canada. You know we've been planning the trip for ages. Come, dearest, take mother's advice."

As Mrs. Harfager spoke she gave a vicious push to the nearest of the images. Valla put out a swift hand to steady it.

"You mustn't touch them. He gave them to me, when everything was still right. . . . When I look at them, it seems somehow as if everything were still right underneath. I suppose they take me back. . . ." She smiled a little and began playing with them absently

where she stood by the mantel, clasping her bracelets around the grooves in the stiff waists, where something seemed to have once been. "Even if they weren't from him, I believe I would love them. Haven't you ever come across things, mother, or places, that made you feel as if they had always been yours, and always would be—as if they were what you needed to make you complete?"

She spoke dreamily, still holding the images.

"I never have," said her mother, the more sharply that she was unhappy about her daughter. "And I certainly could not begin on those hideous things."

She gave her daughter a half-loving, half-angry little shake, and went hurriedly out. As she did the nearest of the images, jarred, perhaps, by her step, fell from its corner and struck her shoulder sharply with its base.

"Hateful thing!" said the mother; but she picked it up, with a good housewife's instinct, and replaced it. She went away then. Valla stayed on where she was. But when she came out, an hour later, she looked so bright and well that her mother commented on it. She said she had been asleep.

She forgot to remove the bracelets from the Little Queens, or perhaps she did not want to. And Kerkoff, prowling up and down the room as was his habit, noticed them, for the first time, when he came next to haunt her. He was looking worse, febrile and haggard. But she thought it was a good sign that he could notice something outside himself. He talked

fragmentarily of Mary Bellamy. He had been walking up and down outside her house. He began to tell Valla how he had seen her, love-making with Richard, night after night.

"There's a little hole in their shade," he said with a short wild laugh. "I can see. For three hours last night—"

She stopped him. There are limits to every one's endurance.

"You must go away," she said, as her mother had said to her. "You are driving yourself mad."

"No. I cannot." He whirled on her, carrying the war into the enemy's country. "You do not go. Why? I do not ask, for I know. You are held here because of that man, who was cruel to you because he is chained to Mary, as I am chained. Only you are stronger, for some reason I cannot guess. . . . I am held by Mary. I hate her as much as I love her. Who knows what is love and what is hate? They are two pieces of one thing. I lie awake at night, fancying her lying in my arms, kissing me and saying she loves me. And then I fancy her lying dead, at other times, never to belong to any one again. I do not know which gives me the most comfort."

She bent over him, one strong hand on his shoulder, where he had sunk down by a couch, his head in his hands.

"You must stop having those feelings," she told him. "They are worse for you than for Mary. It is true I stay here. But it is because I am one of

the women who loves always, having once given love. I do not hate Richard. I love him so much that I know all this is unreal, passing; that my power of love will draw him back to me, and all this be as if it had never been. You must do this too. Wait for that time. Love makes things, where hate breaks them in pieces."

He looked up at her—the half-terrified, half-fierce look of an animal.

"Tell me, you who are so strong, so powerful—ah, yes, it is true what you say, however the power came—what do you want of Mary, how do you feel to Mary?"

She answered him with her strange frankness, her eyes falling into their old unseeingness.

"I cannot tell. I do not know. She does not seem to me like a person, to be hated. Only a dreadfulness that has done something to my Richard. Something that will pass—something that will be gone. . . ."

Andrey shuddered, looking up at her fascinatedly.

"It is worse than what I feel for her. . . . My God, why have I turned to you for help, you—"

He stopped short, staring as if he saw something terrifying behind her. Then he began to laugh.

"So—it is no wonder you are strong, with *these* for counselors! Oh, you are very strong and very clever! You speak of love and forgiveness, and—you stay here with *these*."

He pointed to the mantel.

"You are talking wildly," she said, looking down

into his eyes. "I keep those—Richard gave them to me. That is all."

He shivered a little, and dropped his head submissively.

"Yes. I am talking wildly, I suppose. But we believe in such things, at home—at what was once home. An evil icon will do more than a good one, and more powerful than any are the Little Queens of Death. But after all you are not of Rurik's race."

She spoke to him soothingly.

"No. No indeed. We are Norse, far back, we Harfagers. My ancestresses, they say, were Valas, Norse wise women, from grandmother to granddaughter. Never Russians at all."

He sat back on his haunches, a half-grotesque, clutching figure. He began to laugh a little, softly.

"He brought it on himself, he made you the gift: and you are of the same blood as of Rurik—Rurik the Norseman! I know now where I have seen you. . . . No, I am not going mad. It is not madness, is it, to remember a fresco that was like you, in the Russian city that was a capital in Rurik's day? It was in a palace, on a wall. It was you—on a great white horse. Your yellow hair was in two sheaves bound with gold straps. On either side of your horse's head-stall stood one of the little Queens of Death."

Valla looked at him, rapt.

"You mean—these?"

"These. They were the little goddesses of Rurik; carved by some Russian slave, it may be, but set

always on the head-stalls when his women counselors rode into battle with him. . . . Yes, he had women counselors, beautiful and young, like you, with sheaves of yellow hair. Wise and chaste they were, and strong like men. And they had hands which could beckon the Little Queens of Death to send hell and vengeance on their enemies. . . . Even now the stories are told in the old babouschas' huts at night. It was not well to come between the Counselors and their desires, my own nurse told me. . . . Hell and vengeance . . . you can afford to talk to me with your lips of love and forgiveness, you who are, after all the centuries, still taking counsel with your Little Queens of Death!"

He was in a pitiable state, for all his effort to be quiet. Valla laid her hand on his shoulder again, and looked steadily into his eyes.

"You are losing control over yourself," she said steadily. "You must stop talking and get hold of yourself. You must obey me. Be quiet, Andrey."

He gradually relaxed under her hand. His lips closed firmly, and his face set. Then he crumpled to the floor, and lay there with his eyes shut. He struggled for a little, then lay quietly, as if asleep. She looked at him, wondering. It might have been a sudden swoon from nervous exhaustion. But it seemed more like sleep, and she decided not to try to wake him. She lifted him in her arms, for she was very strong, and laid him on a couch, standing over him, watching him.

He opened his eyes presently. He looked at her without surprise, and spoke in a monotone.

"I am losing control over myself. I must stop talking and get hold of myself. I must obey you."

She did not like his voice. It did not sound natural. But she answered him gently, as if nothing were amiss:

"You are wearing me out, Andrey. Don't you realize that all this is very hard on me? Won't you try to control yourself, as I am doing?"

"I must do what you say, I have no choice," he said dully. "Only do not—do not—"

She looked down at him, puzzled. He had buried his face in the pillows. Presently he looked up. There was the humble appeal of a dog in his face.

"I have always loved Mary so, since I have seen her. I have loved all men. Oh, do not—do not—"

He was moaning as if some terrible thing hung over him. She spoke to him sharply, all the more that she felt half-tranced herself by this time.

"Go now, Andrey. And do as I tell you about going away. I will go myself if you will. When we come back we will both feel better about it all."

He rose stiffly, obediently, as if she were his superior officer.

"I am losing control over myself. I must stop talking and get hold of myself. I must . . . obey you." He repeated the words once more monotonously. He turned to the little images, and went on talking in a low voice, under his breath. "Grief is her hall, Famine her table, Shrieking is her shelter.

But she is Death and Vengeance is her sister, and for golden gifts they will be kind to the Counselors."

It was the Edda of Snorro Sturleson. But it was not all as Valla recalled it.

"Where did you hear that?" she asked him sharply.

"It is part of an old song, one of the songs of Rurik's people. . . ." He broke off what he was saying dazedly, and pushed his hand across his forehead. He walked stiffly out of the room. It did not occur to Valla until later, talking it over, that unconsciously she might have sent him, in his shaken state, into a short hypnotic sleep.

She spoke of the thing reluctantly. It was always hard for Valla to speak of intimate things to any one, even to kind, absent-minded old Dr. Blanton, who never seemed surprised or shocked at anything but misprints, or persons who laid books down on their faces. And it was doubly hard for her to speak of the Little Queens of Death, with all they meant to her. But it seemed to her that she had to do it if she meant to go on helping poor Andrey. And she knew Doctor Blanton could tell her, if any one could, about the little images. Surely he could show her, if any one could, how to convince Andrey that his dreams about the Little Queens, and her link with them, was a very wild thing.

She called up the rectory. She wanted to ask Dr. Blanton something about folklore, she said. Mrs. Garrison answered: yes, Uncle Andrew hadn't gone home yet. Surely she could see him: she knew he

would love to see Valla. There was a particularly warm note in Elisabeth Garrison's voice. Everybody wanted to be as good to Valla Harfager just now as they possibly could be.

Valla winced a little under this knowledge; but after all, it was a small thing beside the greater thing she was going through. She took the little images and drove to the rectory, where Dr. Blanton was waiting in his nephew's library for her.

"Want a few folklore points from the old man?" he asked amiably as she came in. He peered at her over his glasses. "Arden has a habit of relying on public libraries which I deprecate. And I'm several miles from what really, my dear Miss Valla, isn't a bad collection of ethnology. . . . Now if I'd only brought that set of Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologik* in my trunk . . . one shouldn't be overridden by housekeepers as I regrettably allow myself to be."

Valla could not help smiling a little, tense as she was. She set the little images down on the table between them, and told him about poor Andrey Kerkoff's wild words.

"If I could prove to him it was all nonsense—" she ended.

But the old clergyman settled his thick glasses more closely, and lifted first one of the little ugly images, then the other. . . . He touched the grooved breast lightly.

"It's true what he says—or most of it," he said slowly.

She stared at him.

"True?"

"Rurik was as much a Norseman as any of your ancestors. Did you never know that, my dear?"

"No."

"The rest is interesting; extremely interesting!" went on Dr. Blanton enthusiastically. "The legend of the Valas who were with him, being kept alive all this time by Russian peasants—my dear child, I really must write to the Folk-Lore Society about that!—and the fresco you speak of on the wall. . . . Certainly I believe it. I believe very strongly in folk-legends, myself. The tales may be warped or misunderstood in transmission, but there is always something rational behind them. Moreover, your images are Helas, most certainly, the death goddess of Norse mythology. See the bodies, one half blue and one half life color? That is an unmistakable proof. Duplication of a god or goddess is common enough."

"She was Death and her sister was Vengeance. He said that," Valla said in a low voice.

"The attributes have been made separate goddesses," Dr. Blanton explained, his face lighting with scientific interest. "And so Rurik's Valas rode into battle with these death-goddesses on their horses' headstalls? Of course. . . . They would be a great help in bringing down death and vengeance on one's enemies. They would have some of the power, perhaps all the power of the original goddess. . . . You know, my dear," he went on, interested in his subject, "it is really possible that the focusing of thought and be-

lief on visible representations like these might have an actual effect. We are coming back in this generation more and more to the belief in the physical power of mental things. The war broke down many of our inhibitions in that respect. God and the devil have both been closer, since, to the generality of people."

She interrupted him with what was almost a cry. She had clutched the images again.

"Oh, so many terrible old Powers have been loosed since then! I am afraid—I am afraid! They have always hated the white Christ. And all the fumes of blood have given them strength again."

She spoke in a half chant, with dilated eyes.

Dr. Blanton nodded gravely. "Of course. That is, setting aside the spiritual side of it, the basic idea of all sacrifices. Valla, my dear, let me urge you to destroy—no—no, I cannot ask that—but at least give away these images. Some museum would be glad to have them; and I am assured from what I have seen of you and them that you are in danger of having other gods beside the God of the Christians, if you keep them. Give them away. *They can give you too much help.*"

She did not seem to hear him. She was staring wide-eyed at the Little Queens. She rose slowly to her feet, still staring before her. She lifted her arms slowly above her head, her eyes set and her lips apart. She was ghastly white, and quite certainly knew nothing of what was going on about her. Her whole being

was concentrated on the images lifted over her head.

"It was exactly as I have seen other Quakeresses in Meeting, when they were moved by the spirit," Dr. Blanton told her mother afterward, using the Quaker phrase. "That was why I was not more alarmed. It is a well-defined type of ecstasy."

But her mother was not to be appeased. The girl had not come to for hours. The hypotheses—that, being worn out by what she had gone through, the idea that she had unwittingly hypnotized Kerkoff had had a reflex action on her—and the other, that it was more or less the same mental state as the well-known Quaker "Moving of the Spirit," did not seem to her to have anything to do with the question. She swept Valla away with her to Canada. Kerkoff left on the same day, she heard afterward, but nevertheless she was glad she had carried off her daughter, even though Valla had come out of her state of trance, or whatever it was, apparently more full of strength and life and vigor than ever.

Mrs. Harfager would have been glad to keep Valla away till Richard's marriage was an accomplished fact. But it was difficult for her to stay away from home so long, herself, and Valla reassured her.

"I cannot care about any of it as you think I do," she said. "I have an assurance—" she smiled a little as she quoted the old Quaker phrase—"that it will be all right for me, finally."

Indeed, Valla had never seemed so strong, so certain

of herself, so alight with that strange inner glow of power, as she was now. So they returned. If her mother had not known Valla's crystalline truth beyond a doubt, she would have thought her daughter had communicated in some way with Kerkoff. For he returned, as he had gone, on the same day they did. Not strong and alight, like Valla. He seemed more racked, more shaken and unhappy, than ever. He was as thin and drawn as if he had been starved, or tortured. He had the look of a tortured man. But he came to see Valla no more.

Mary Bellamy did the final outrageous thing when Valla came back. She demanded her for a bridesmaid. . . . Outrageous, yet very clever, for if Valla refused she would be no worse off, and if she accepted she publicly forgave, and then who else in the town could visit Mary's and Richard's wrong-doing on them? And Valla accepted.

The other girls of the town, more her friends, far, than Mary's, talked it over, naturally. It was the sort of wonderful forgiveness that only a woman with Quaker self-control could show. It made them shiver a little, to think of her being such a saint. Only Nancy Whitall shook her head. Her mother had come from up Lancaster way, where the old folk-lore of the Palatinate still holds its children to their far-traveled deaths. She made a curious little sign with one ringed, tennis-tanned hand. Another of them looked at her, startled. She was a free-spoken girl, Jennifer Wharton. *"Hex?"* she said, using the patois word that

the men and women of the back country still shiver at. "Do you mean Mary Bellamy? Nonsense. She simply goes farther to get what she wants than most decent people. That's not *hexry*."

Nancy shook her short fluff of dark hair.

"I don't mean Mary. I was thinking—even if I didn't love her—I wouldn't hurt Valla Harfager. And I was thinking of two things. One was old Valah Wynne."

"She wasn't *hex*, any more than this Valla is. She was religious, too." The other girl knew the story, one of the Colonial tales which are not forgotten in the villages—where three hundred years ago seems very close still. Jennifer, too was of the old stock.

"Whatever she was, preacher in Meeting or not, you know what she did. They whipped her at the cart's tail for being a Quaker, and stripped her, of course, to the waist. She had left her husband and children and gone up through the New England towns to testify. And the head Selectman put his hand on her and said something about her white skin and her fair shape. She was only twenty-six. I suppose she was like this Valla. And she said back to him, very quietly, 'Neither skin nor shape shall trouble thee, thine nor another's, God bids me tell thee, before the coming First-Day.' Then they tied her up and whipped her out of the town. And that Saturday the man's plow-horses went wild while he stood in front of them, and trampled him—and the sharp plow-blade went over him afterward."

"What happened then?" asked a girl who did not know the story.

"Nothing. When they were through whipping her they let her go. She came back home and went on bringing up children and preaching in meeting till she died. She was very strong. Jesse Wynne is her great-great grandson."

"That story doesn't prove anything," said Jennifer. "The two things happened, or people said they happened. They needn't have been connected."

Nancy said nothing more. She was remembering the other thing. There had been a child, a little girl named Thelma Robinson, a common little outlander, who had tormented Valla abominably when they were both schoolchildren. . . . No. . . . No, she wouldn't think of poor little vulgar Thelma, nor the way she had died —her death in another state, the next month, a ghastly copy of the way she had tormented Valla. . . . It didn't prove anything. She loved Valla, as every one else did. And yet. . . . She would not have liked to hurt Valla.

Valla seemed a person whom it would have been difficult to hurt. She went through her share of the bridesmaids' luncheons and teas always serenely, and with that strange look as if everything was all right—somewhere. It did not seem an embarrassment for her to meet Richard. Her way with him, one would have almost said, was pitying, like a mother's for an unhappy child. The situation was visibly hard for him. The others, watching, began to wonder if Mary's

spell, an almost purely physical one, was holding against the constant sight and sound of Valla. Whatever happened, it was too late for him to do anything. People were sorry for him. One couldn't help loving Richard, wayward and generous and impulse-swayed boy that he was.

Mary made the mistake, finally, of attacking him about his very obvious constraint in Valla's presence, a thing she should have expected, one would have thought. She harried and tormented him, he taking it silently, till she went too far, flinging at him contemptuous words about Valla—her lack of human feeling, of human emotion. It was the string she had always played on. This time it, and Richard's fragile poise, broke.

"Valla is a saint," he cried out to her. "She is too high for either of us to speak of."

"She never kissed you of her own accord. She never showed you human love. She hasn't any," Mary reiterated. She flung herself against him, with the half-angry, passionate kisses that had always been one of her strongest weapons. She really loved Richard.

Richard, who had taken Valla's repression for coldness, looked at Mary, bewildered.

"She said she loved me so much that we could never belong to any one but each other," he said reluctantly. "She said that when I broke with her. . . . She—had never said it before. Mary, Mary!" He clung to her, as men cling unheeding to what loves them, while he poured out his feelings to her. "I see

her at night when I can't sleep. For hours every day I feel her presence all around me. I'm wrapped round by her strength, her power—her love. Mary—I had to tell you. She knew better than I when she told me, then, that I belonged to her too much ever to be another woman's. Mary—I'll do whatever you say."

He was white and shuddering with the effort of confession. Mary, more furious than ever, wrenched herself from him, and struck back with a cheap flippancy.

"Nothing for you but to go to Utah, if that's the way you feel about it. I suppose I might have known the sort you were—if you'd break with one you would with two. *No.* We'll go on with this marriage. I won't be shamed before all these virtuous country people who sit around judging me all the time with their solemn eyes. We'll get divorced afterwards if it doesn't work." Then she fell to sobbing, in his arms once more. And the spell of her ardent physical closeness made him half forget again. Only marriage would have made Valla able to give him the unlocked passion Mary could toss lightly to every one. Once freed, she had immeasurably more to give. Mary's kissings and caressings were not real—there was less behind. And this was beginning to face Richard. But he was very gentle and loving with Mary afterwards. He had spoiled his life and Valla's. He wouldn't spoil Mary's. And so the girl went about, triumphant once more; till the next day she crossed Valla on the street. Before Valla's steady, illumined smile and courteous words and aura of content some-

how the triumph evaporated. It was only natural self-control and hardness, she tried to tell herself. But somehow the whole thing was beginning to get her nerve. She could not believe that Valla was, as she was, honestly forgiving. She did not believe in high standards, having none, poor child. And she wished Andrey Kerkoff would go away, or come and have it out with her, or something. She'd just been having a good time—why did they all take it so hard? . . . She felt tangled in something—she did not know what. She was frightened.

Nevertheless events went on. They included the necessity of housing Valla with Mary, for the wedding was to be at the house of Mary's uncle, a hundred miles from the cousin Mary had lived with in Valla's town. Mary, with her wedding close, drew her arrogant airs more firmly about her and showed her possession of Richard perhaps all the more that she knew she did not wholly possess him. Valla's serenity, too, must have irked her badly. A triumph loses much of its excitement if the vanquished does not seem to know his defeat.

Still, Mary did nothing overt until the night before the wedding day. Half of her eight bridesmaids were from Valla's town, the other half here in her old home. It may have occurred even to her that with the three girls who were visitors a solid phalanx about Valla, and of consequence in the place where she was to spend the rest of her life, she would do well to be courteous. At all events, she was—until, blazing with excitement at

the end of the dance just ended, she flashed in her sequinned blue-green dance-frock through the door of the room Valla shared with Nancy Whitall. The two girls were getting ready for bed, Nancy stooping to unstrap the gold ribbons that had laced her slippers to her knees, and Valla weaving her hair into two heavy corn-colored braids for the night. There had been no room for maids.

"Anybody got a pair of scissors?" Mary demanded. "I've lost—"

She stopped short. Her eye had fallen on the two little images, clumsy, grotesque, and yet somehow not laughable, thick-lipped, sullen-faced, carved in their time-aged worm-eaten wood, with a faint gilt still showing on their chess-queen crowns, and a faint dull blue still making half their little ill-carved bodies more sinister. They stared straight ahead, hands clenched apart behind them over some hidden thing. They were set on the small table by Valla's bed, to be near her, as they had been near her ever since her lover gave them to her.

"What hideous, adorable little horrors!" she said. "Are they a present I've missed? Oh, I'm crazy over them!"

Valla smiled up at her with her steady serenity, going on with the braiding of her yellow hair.

"No. They are mine. I am fond of them because they are the last gift Richard made me."

She spoke as if Richard were some one dearly loved, and dead.

"It was ghastly, somehow, hearing her talk straight out, nakedly, like that. Yet it was wonderful, too. It was like hearing one of Shakespeare's women," Nancy said afterward. Nancy could never make sufficient allowance for the terrific simplicity and frankness of the Friend. Yet there was more to it than that. Perhaps Nancy was right. There was something epic, Shakespearian, in the way Valla fronted her little arrogant rival. It must have shaken Mary, because she essayed insolence in answer, and that was always a sign that she was fretted or angry.

"I don't see what you want them for when you haven't Richard. I'm crazy over them. Come on, give them to me for a wedding present."

Valla's steady fingers went on with their weaving as she answered, still serenely.

"You must have them, if you want them. But do you think you are wise? They may not like another mistress."

Mary laughed. "I'll risk that. May I, really?"

Valla made a gesture toward them. She did not touch them. And Mary actually swept them up. She turned at the door, a glittering little figure, waved them at Valla with what seemed to the angry Nancy a gesture of triumph, and was gone pattering down the passage, laughing in the childish way which covered so many of her unpardonablenesses.

Valla sat still on the bed, mechanically braiding her hair. Nancy looked over at her, presently, frightened

at her stillness. The finished plait had slipped from her fingers, and her face was drawn, convulsed. The uncanny air of power and joy and serenity had fallen from her as if it had been only a veil she was wrapped in. Nancy, who had known and loved her always, ran to her and caught her in her arms, and Valla's head fell forward on her friend's shoulder. She began to sob helplessly, heartbrokenly, like any forsaken and insulted girl. She clung to Nancy. "I can't bear it—I can't bear it!" she wept. "Oh, Nancy, how have I ever gone through it? Why did I ever say I would come here and be their bridesmaid? He is mine, he's mine, and I must stand there to-morrow and see him married to another woman. I can't—I shan't do it. I will go away. I'll go home. Nancy, Nancy, it's killing me—it's all I cared for in the world, being Richard's. Nancy—"

She clutched Nancy more convulsively. She was sobbing so that she could not speak. She seemed broken to pieces. Presently she caught at a little more control, and began speaking brokenly again.

"It's real—I don't believe I've let myself think it was true till now—I've gone on like somebody in a dream, or drugged—I thought it was the grace of God, or pride, or self-control—but now I know it's real that he's gone from me—it's real! . . . It was the taking of the last things he gave me, the last things I had to look and love because his hands had touched them. . . . I gave back all the rings, everything, even the last little

ring he gave me—oh, oh, it wasn't worth anything, she wouldn't have cared. . . ." The sobs silenced her again. Nancy could only sit holding her, and feeling the heavy sobs shake her uncontrollably. She wished she could kill Mary and Richard. Valla was so splendid, so perfect, and this little Mary was such a worthless, stupidly brutal little person, and yet it was she who had shattered Valla so that she could only sob here, broken and helpless, stripped of even her pride.

"I'm sorry, Nancy," she said finally, with the remembrance of others that was natural to her. "I've kept you awake too long. Go to bed now. I'll be all right."

Nancy kissed her and went. But for the hour that she lay awake, heartily hating the bride and bridegroom, she could hear Valla's weeping, softly in the bed near her.

It seemed to Nancy that she had but just gone to sleep, but she had really slept over an hour. She had been dreaming of armies, hordes of strangely clad, flying people, who screamed as they fled before helmeted men and women on great white horses. She was wakened still hearing the echoes of the broken scream. She sat up in the dark, still shaken. There was a rush of frightened feet outside her door. . . . That had been the reason she had dreamed. She sprang up and ran out, scarcely waiting to wrap a kimono around her. There was an unacknowledged terror in her heart as she passed Valla's empty bed. . . .

The scream had not been Valla's voice. . . . She found some of the other girls in the hall. She clutched Jennifer.

"What was it—oh, what was it?"

Jennifer looked at her strangely as she answered under her breath.

"Something dreadful has happened in Mary's room. They won't let us in."

Nancy's heart seemed to turn over in her bosom. She felt as if she had always known what had happened in Mary's room, and at the same time as if she would never know. She ran down the corridor, and pushed her way through the crowding, half-dressed girls and men with hysterical strength, flinging herself against the dreadful shut door and entering, as some one—some unimportant person—was coming out.

Mary's little face, white as she had never seen it in life, flung back on her pillow. That was the first thing she saw. Mary's aunt, crying with her head on the counterpane. . . . No, no! People didn't have great red stains over their hearts—not except in murder cases in newspapers. Not *really,* ever. It couldn't be little impudent, arrogant Mary, lying there, irrevocably, solemnly dead. And Valla—why was Valla standing so still at the bed's foot, so close to the dead girl? Nancy turned in bewilderment to the only other familiar face.

"Richard," she whispered, "was it because of the little Queens of Death?"

Richard turned his haggard face to her. "Yes," he said.

Valla stood on, still and pale, never taking her eyes from Mary.

And then, when Nancy felt that another turn of the screw would drive her wild, she heard a new voice.

"It was the Little Queens of Death," said Andrey Kerkoff's accented voice shrilly, from where he stood in the shadow, held by two of the men. "I did not want to do it. I had to—I had to! I was sent by the Little Queens of Death, and the mistress they obeyed. They have drunk now, and they will not torment me any more."

"He was insane," said Richard's shuddering voice. "He came in by the open window . . . and . . . we saw him, too late. . . ."

He could not go on. Nancy's eyes went to the little table by Mary's bedside, following his. The images lay there, tossed down. But across each thick mouth was a fresh stain, as dolls would have if a child had pretended to give them a drink. . . .

"They are mine," said Valla in a clear expressionless voice. "Richard gave them to me. I should like to have them back." She dropped in a dead faint at the bed's foot.

. . . . . .

She was given them back after the jury was through. Kerkoff was violently insane, and apparently always would be. The alienists said that his delusion of being supernaturally impelled to murder his faithless sweet-

heart was a very usual thing. They gave it a name. Defense reaction, they called it.

Valla took Richard back, as people had thought she would. His attitude of worship toward her was almost pitiful. He seemed to feel as if he could never atone for what he had done. She was just the same serene, strong Valla she had always been, except that she was more frankly, infinitely loving.

There were no guests when Dr. Blanton married them. Only Nancy Whitall and Valla's parents. Her mother had insisted, though, on a wedding-gown and veil. After they had been married Valla went upstairs by herself, to change into her traveling dress. They were to drive off somewhere, far, far off. She came down presently, in her dark suit and hat, to where Richard and her people waited. She looked at them for a moment with a puzzled, strained expression, as if there was something she was trying to remember—then turned to the right, into her own sitting-room, across from the room where she had been married. Her mother, who had seen her face, caught Nancy's hand sharply for a moment, and almost uttered a cry. But she stood still, by a great effort, beside the men, and in a short time Valla came out again.

"I give them to you now," she said to Dr. Blanton.

For a moment she had the old strange look. Then she was flushed and brilliantly smiling again, Valla at her most vital and brilliant. The tension broke, and the two drove off among light-hearted good-bys.

Valla took the wheel after the first seventy-five miles,

to take her turn at driving. Richard looked adoringly at her bare, beautiful hands, and then spoke idly.

"Where are all your rings, sweetheart? I thought you said you would put all I gave you on to be married in."

Valla, surprised, looked down at her hands. "I had them on when I was married. I remember feeling them hurt when you pressed my hand. . . . I can't remember. . . . It's strange. . . . Had I better go back?" She looked distressed. She hated these lapses of memory. She had not had one now for a long time.

"No, dear. They're somewhere in the house—you took them off to wash your hands, likely. Your mother will find them—they're safe enough."

Her mother, going with Nancy and Dr. Blanton into Valla's little room after she had gone, paused in the middle of the floor and clutched Nancy's hand again. Neither of them said anything, then or afterwards. Together on the mantel, as they had always been, stood the Little Queens of Death. Wrapped around their feet like a votive offering was the orange-blossom wreath from Valla's hair. And from worm-eaten wooden wrist to clumsy wooden shoulder of each of them, fitting in the grooves some long-dead slave had carved for just such a thing, were strung her lover's rings. On the breast of each of them, in a hollowed old place made for it, a diamond earring made a bosom-jewel. Clumsy, grotesque, yet somehow not laughable,

with gold chains wrapped into the grooved borders of their stiff wooden skirts, jewel-braceleted, jewel-belted, with faint stains still across the livid blue of the sullen faces under the chess-queen crowns, they looked very content, the Little Queens of Death.

POWERS OF DARKNESS

As he stepped slowly from the Morgan house Dr. Blanton was repeating something which might have sounded to some one who could not hear the words like a pious invocation. It was not, however.

"From goblins and ghaisties, and nine-legged beasties,
And things which go Boomp in the nicht,
Good Lord deliver us!"

he remarked, pulling the drawstrings of his felt bag close to keep himself from the temptation of reading along the path. He was smiling a little—he had been talking to an elderly lady who would have bored him a little if he had not been able to smile at her. Then the smile faded into concern.

"I hope the poor child is going to be given time to get over it by that impetuous young beau of hers," he muttered. Her aunt's opposition has been just enough to build up a contrariness that is going to "go boomp in the night" straight against Dirk Conkling's ideas. They're all pretty firm, or that's what they call it, the Conklings. Old Archdeacon Conkling and the Athanasian creed. . . ." He smiled again behind his little gray beard, and fiddled guiltily with the strings of the bag. Then he ran straight into a girl and a man who were

coming up the path as he went down. . . . It was Roderick Conkling and his sister Esther, whom he had thought safe at Dirk's own parish-house, in the middle of a reception of Dirk's people, for their young clergyman had been kept overseas till the last possible moment, and had just come back to them.

The Conklings had escaped from the reception as early as they decently could; Dirk had made up his mind to make another effort to see Lucia Morgan.

As they had shut the door of the parish house and turned to go down the sweet-smelling, wind-blown main street of their little town, Esther Conkling slipped her arm in her brother's and tried to turn him in the opposite direction from the one to their home.

"Let's go the longest way, Dirk," she said hurriedly and lightly. "It's such a lovely night, and you must want fresh air after three hours of being welcomed home by your loving friends."

Roderick Conkling stood quite immovable, unheeding her tremulous attempt at flippancy. Esther might as well have tried to move an iron figure.

"Do you suppose I don't see that accursed light of Lucia's every night in the world, whether I pass it or not?" he demanded. "Walking under it doesn't make any difference. I know it's there."

She gave up with a little sigh of pity, and an "Oh, my dear!" of sisterly affection, and went on in their original road. It was a charming old town with wide, elm-shaded streets. After France it must have seemed to Dirk Conkling as peaceful and lovely as Paradise.

The church he had just left had been his father's before him; and its people had held its rectorship open to him while he was away in the army. Big, kindly, masculine, fearless, one of the men people take to instinctively, with a hold on the affection and respect of his people such as few clergymen of the present day have, Dirk Conkling hadn't known, ever in his life before, what it was to have an absolutely impassable barrier rise up between him and what he wanted and thought right to have or do. His father before him had been, as he was, half rector, half squire of the little courteous old Southern town. To a good and dominant man with charm, money, and a certain amount of power life presents itself as a straight and simple thing. And the light in Lucia Morgan's window represented to Dirk, in spite of his year on the battlefields, the first incomprehensible horror he had ever faced.

Esther hurried him on, chattering as fast as she could. She tried to make him forget the light; but it was so present in her own mind that it would have echoed in his even if he had not been thinking of it; the light and the picture they knew was back of the light; Lucia Morgan's slender body and rapt, exalted face, bent over something on her knees; opposite her the heavier bulk and coarse, time-scarred face of old Jen Gracey, rapt and avid too. Esther had seen them so the last night she had been admitted to the house, before Lucia and she had quarreled over what Lucia called Esther's flippancy. She turned her head aside

with a sick and baffled feeling; and felt Dirk's stoniness again. He had halted.

"Whose buggy is that, tied outside?" he asked.

Esther laughed a little. "There are only two people in a radius of I don't know how many miles who have buggies any more," she said. "It must be either old Mr. Merriman or Doctor Blanton." She came up closer. "It's Dr. Blanton's Horatius," she said, stroking the old horse's mild, moth-eaten white face with a friend's hand.

"Why will she let him in, if she won't me?" said Dirk with a spasm of jealousy. "He's as much a clergyman as I am. And he wouldn't say he believed what he didn't believe, not to get into Heaven itself. I know Uncle Andrew. He may wander around with his nose in the classics and the reins on Horatius' neck, but once you make him realize what you're talking about—"

"Uncle Andrew's an old man. And perhaps,—you know people are harder on you, the more they care for you. Lucia does care for you, Dirk. I believe she'll get over this and be all right."

"I don't know that I want her, if she can be as insane as this," he said, with the harshness of pain.

But he opened the gate, and his sister followed. Halfway up the walk they saw the door open, and old Dr. Blanton come out. He wandered down the path absently hunting in his black felt bag for something, and—which was no more than they expected—did not

see the Conklings at all. Esther caught his hand as it came out with a small, fat black book in it.

"I don't insist on your speaking to me, but I think you might to Dirk," she said. "He's been away long enough to be looked at when he comes home."

"Dirk, my dear boy! You can scarcely imagine what pleasure it gives me—here is something I really must show you. It is a black-letter Vescelius that I have borrowed from Mrs. Barry. I suppose I shall return it, but the flesh—alas, the flesh is weak. I should very much like to commit petit larceny. An old man like me should be permitted to steal books; say one a fortnight. One a fortnight would not be excessive, do you think?"

Dirk was in no mood, self-concentrated as he was, for old Uncle Andrew Blanton's mannered and leisurely pleasantries.

"Uncle Andrew, why does she let you in when she won't let me? She told me no one should enter her house who denied the existence of spirits. She's killing herself with that hellish board, and the old woman who has her hypnotized."

Dr. Blanton blinked behind his double-lensed spectacles.

"As a minister of the gospel, Dirk, I have never found anything that prevented me from believing in all the spirits I wanted to," he said. "In my day, you see, we were more apt to be rebuked for believing too little than too much. Fashion's a curious thing. Now in Cotton Mather's day—"

"Uncle Andrew, do you mean that you believe that old woman is doing her good, or that there's anything in it?"

It was not possible to hurry Dr. Blanton. Perhaps he knew that Dirk needed a moment to get hold of himself in; perhaps he was merely talking with his usual oblivious enjoyment of his own conversation.

"I admit I've been poaching," he said. "Mine's the next parish. But under the circumstances—"

Dirk, scarcely courteous in his impatience, left the old man with a muttered apology and went up the steps.

"I'm going in. Come with me, Ess," he said shortly. His sister looked up at his strained face, and with a quick hand-clasp for their old friend silently followed him up the walk. As they stood before the door waiting to be let in, Esther spoke softly.

"You know how it was, dear," she said. "Lucia is so gentle, so dependent on people to love her; and there wasn't anybody. Whey they both went at once that way—think, with her father and mother dead inside two weeks, and you in France! And her aunt couldn't come on to stay with her for months. She used to walk the floor and say, 'Oh, if I could only speak to mother once! If she could only tell me that I hadn't neglected her in her illness! If I only knew it wasn't my fault! . . .'"

"That's no excuse, Ess," he said with the harshness she knew meant suffering. "When our mother died we used to ask ourselves that. It's one of the things

everybody does when they lose people they love. But we didn't try to drag her back from Heaven."

"We were stronger—" Esther began, as the door flew open and they went in.

"This is Lucia's aunt, Mrs. Barry," she continued. "This is my brother, Roderick, Mrs. Barry. Lucia and he were going to be married, you know."

She was a tall, tremulously elegant woman in too-picturesque but expensive clothes, faded and gentle.

"I know—I know," she fluttered. "Oh, Mr. Conkling, I did all I could— If you hadn't written her that they were not real—she couldn't bear to think of my poor sister Lucy not being real—you know how devoted she was to her mother."

"I know," he said. "But I haven't seen her yet, Mrs. Barry. Mightn't I go up? She forbade me to see her, and for a week I've kept away. I can't any longer."

There was a boyish appeal in his voice that would have won a stronger woman than gentle, ineffectual Lilian Barry.

"I promised," she hesitated, "but—I do think she isn't fair to you. Only—only please don't be rude to them. They say such things about people that are . . . And I *don't* think a girl brought up like Lucia ought to associate with Mrs. Gracey, or the horrid people that were her friends before they died. . . ."

Esther stayed to listen to her random, plaintive talk, but Dirk had hurried up the stairs to Lucia's sitting-room. She followed him with her eyes as she listened,

and Mrs. Barry rambled on. "And the house has the most dreadful *feel*. . . . Lucia says that by and by it will get so it's easier and easier for Them to come. It frightens me so—I do believe in atmospheres, you know. I always carry a candle everywhere now."

As Esther followed her more slowly up the stair, she was conscious indeed that the old house had an atmosphere new to her. It had always had a friendly feel, a feel of contented homelikeness, from the time she and Lucia played hide-and-seek up and down its broad stairs when they were children. That feeling was gone. In its stead was an eeriness and blankness new to her, though it was scarcely two months since she had walked out of it, furious with Lucia. She was not angry with her any more—poor little Lucia, seeking across the world's boundaries for the love that had always sheltered her! But she said a little prayer as she went slowly into the room where the others stood.

It had been the playroom in their childhood. Lucia had taken it for her especial place when she grew older. It had been full of pretty, gay, girlish things—dance-programs, woven baskets, batik draperies; traces of the handicrafts Lucia had always been so clever about. They were all swept down now. Books were everywhere, all on the one subject. A couple of the titles caught Esther's eye as she stood in the doorway: *But I am not Dead!* and *Revelations from My Child*. And Lucia herself, with the wonderful rapt light on her face that Esther remembered, was leaning back in her low chair. Opposite to her, with her hands

on the little heart-shaped wooden "traveler" still, lying on its lettered board, sat sullenly old Jen Gracey. It was she who was talking, as if she were the mistress of the place, and not pale, ecstatic Lucia. She was a full-bodied woman of perhaps sixty, with thick black hair scarcely streaked with gray, a powerful face, harshly lined, and with vivid black eyes. Power radiated from her, and intensity of feeling. She was poorly dressed, and carelessly, and the broad, strong hand resting on the "traveler" was warped and knotted and black-nailed.

"If all you can do," she was saying in a deep, harsh voice to Dirk, "is to come here an' slander my blessed boy that you played with when you were little, an' Mis' Morgan, that always treated you like her own children, you better git out. That's what I say, you better git out. 'Be patient with him!' They says. 'Be patient, he ain't seen the light yit.' But I think it's time They quit bein' patient. Malignin' Mis' Morgan and Myron, sayin' they ain't real!"

It was Lucia whom Dirk answered, not old Jen Gracey.

"Oh, Lucia darling!" he said. "Your mother is in Heaven, happy; too happy to come back and push that silly piece of wood over its board. But I have to tell you what I believe. I believe that there's nothing behind that board but your own mind. And I believe, with your delicate organism, that you're running a fearful chance of having the strain snap your nerves; perhaps even do something to your mind. Mrs. Gracey

is strong enough to stand it. You're not. Lucia, Lucia, give up this child's play and come with me. . . . Lucia! You haven't any right to give me up because I believe one thing and you believe another! If it's love you need, you know you have all mine!"

Lucia looked at him, still with the look of angelic happiness on her face. She was thinner than she had been and Dirk remembered with a twist of the knife in his heart what Esther had told him; that Lucia scarcely ate or slept now.

"Oh, Dirk, I do love you!" she said. "I was angry at Esther because she laughed at Mother when she first came. But Mother says I mustn't be. But how can I marry a man who thinks the most wonderful thing I ever found—the most wonderful revelation the world has ever known—is untrue? If you could hear what they say. . . . Such beautiful things—"

"Quick! They've come again!" interrupted old Mrs. Gracey passionately. "Put yer hands on, Lushy!"

Lucia's white hands alighted on the little wooden thing beside Mrs. Gracey's strong old gnarled, dirty ones.

"Take it down, Esther!" she said breathlessly; and Esther found herself snatching up the pad and pencil that lay ready and putting down letter by letter. Dirk, caught up too in the sudden wave of emotion, stood quiet.

"M-y b-o-y," the thing spelt, and Esther took down, then more swiftly, "M-u-s-t s-p-e-a-k t-o-"

"Yes?" Mrs. Gracey interrupted breathlessly. "Who to? Is this Mis' Morgan?"

The pointer raced to "no" and slid back again. "A-n-n-a-m-e-l-i-c-e-r-t-e-" it spelt, and Esther, putting down what seemed to her a farrago of letters, heard her brother gasp.

"Stop it!" he said harshly. And she remembered that their mother had never been willing to have any one know what her second name was. Even her children had not known it— "a ridiculous name out of a Restoration play" she had told them. It was one of the childish, adorable things that had made them love her more. But her first name had been Anna. . . . Anna Melicerte?

She went on recording. . . . "I-p-u-t-c-u-f-f-l-i-n-k—"

"That was 'cuff-link!'" she heard old Jen Gracey say in her avid voice.

". . . i-n-t-e-a-r-v-a-s-e-d-a-y-I-p-a-s-s-e-d-o-v-e-r," it spelt; Esther checked it off into words; "in tear-vase day before I passed over." She felt an awed thrill. "R-o-d-d-y-h-a-s-m-a-t-e-t-h-i-s-i-s-f-o-r-p-r-o-o-f . . ."

"Stop it! For Heaven's sake, stop it!" she heard Roderick say passionately. "Make the devilish thing stop!"

But it went on relentlessly, and Esther kept on taking it down; "H-e-m-u-s-t-b-e-l-i-e-v-e-l-o-v-e-m-u-n-n-i-e—"

The traveler raced down to "good-by" and was dead still. Old Jen Gracey leaned back in her chair as if exhausted, and Lucia too, looked tired.

"My, that was a strong force!" she said. "Your ma must have spiritual gifts. . . ."

Esther felt a choking in her throat. . . . *"Munnie"*—that had been Roderick's name for their mother. Roddy, she had always called him. Still it did not prove anything to her. She looked, still shaken, over at her brother. He was white and tense and had half turned away as if to hide his face.

"Oh, Dirk, wasn't that wonderfully clear?" she heard Lucia's sweet, happy voice say. "They scarcely ever get it as clear as that the first time they come. Dirk, surely you'll believe when your own mother asks you . . . *'Look in the tear-vase . . .'* Was there a tear-vase?"

"You know there was a tear-vase," he said almost accusingly.

She shook her head smiling.

"*They* know everything."

He had himself in hand by now.

"Mrs. Gracey used to clean for Mother."

The old woman started up, furious, but he went on unheeding.

"Lucia, for God's sake, give this up. If what the thing said proves to be true, it only confirms me in my belief. It is killing you. Give it up, if you ever loved me, or your mother or your father! They wouldn't want—"

The traveler, under the strangely paired hands, began again. "W-e-k-n-o-w-a-n-d-b-l-e-s-s——" it said.

"You see," said Lucia almost gaily, "they know and

bless! Why, Dirk, it's like having them back—with me! Mother tells me what to do about everything, and Mrs. Gracey's son tells her. They're as alive as they ever were. Close!"

"It's all a lie," said Dirk doggedly. To him right and wrong were black and white. And the sight of this thing gripping his Lucia was almost driving him mad.

But at his unguarded word she flashed up again. She was so thin and transparent that she was almost like pure light, vivified as she was by her radiant happiness.

"I told you before never to come near me!" she said. "When I saw you to-night I was sorry I'd said it. You must never come again—I will never see you again—as long as you say such dreadful things of my own people. I know now I was wrong to have you. When you can tell me you believe you can come, not before. My first love and duty belong to Them."

"If you loved me—" he began.

"I do love you," she said, serene again. "My love may be the means of helping you to the revelation. I'm not frightened about it. They say you will believe soon. They always know."

"Come, Dirk," whispered Esther.

He followed his sister out hopelessly. Mrs. Barry was at the bottom of the stairs waiting for them.

"Could you say anything that would make her give up that dreadful woman?" she asked eagerly.

"Nothing I can say will have any effect, I'm afraid," he answered her. There are always people like that, whom you must answer courteously at times like that.

"But what do you really believe?" she pursued. "I suppose as a clergyman you must. . . . I took up 'Scientific Thought' last winter—a course of lessons—and they said you mustn't believe in evil at all. . . . Of course. . . ."

He gave her some indecisive answer, he never remembered what.

He swept Esther away. They gained their own home with no more said.

"She watched you out of sight," Esther ventured as they went in. "I saw her face against the pane, just as we left the gate. I think it's just as if that dreadful old woman had bewitched her. . . Dirk, shall you look in the tear-vase? I suppose it would be that little earthen slim thing in Father's old study."

He nodded.

"I've seen it before, Ess," he said heavily, turning as they reached the study door, still in their outdoor things. "There was a man in my regiment who used to do it with a planchette. . . . His sweetheart, poor fellow, was killed in a train accident before he left. He had his hands on it every minute he got the chance, writing, writing, writing—messages from her, of course. He got so after a while that he didn't sleep or eat; just that same wild, happy look on his face my poor Lucia has. Finally it told him all sorts of things to do. Wicked

things some of them. His mind went, after six months of it. There's nothing that adequately explains it to my mind."

"The room seemed thick to-night," Esther assented, shuddering. "But I can't go that far with you, Dirk. . . ." She crossed the room with a visible effort, and laid her hand on the old Roman tear-vase. "Even if the cuff-link *is* in this thing—even if Mother's middle name *was* Melicerte—telepathy might account for it all . . . and yet, mightn't there be something else?"

She lifted the little vase as she spoke and reversed it against her palm. Something tinkled against the earthenware as she shook it. She lifted the vase silently and held out her hand to her brother, with an initialed gold cuff-link lying on the palm.

He took it.

"Yes," he said, "I have the other one."

They looked at each other, dumb and pallid.

"Come," said Esther briskly at last. "We'd better go to bed. Don't give up, Dirk, old boy. It's just a lady under enchantment. You'll free her all right. Give her time."

"I must, it seems," he said ruefully. Then, as they parted for the night, "Esther, I'm going to fight this thing in the village if it means my eternal ruination—which it doesn't. It's just folly and deception—a lying old woman."

He wrote to Lucia; he telephoned her and tried again to see her. It was of no avail after that. He was not

admitted, neither he nor Esther. Twice he crossed old Jen Gracey, malignly triumphant.

"I'm just a dreadful, common old woman that tells lies," she told him, facing him angrily. "That's what you think. An' I'm the only way Lushy Morgan can git to talk with her folks that's dead—that's what *she* thinks, an' it's true. An' she's the only person I've got in the world to love an' do fer, an' s'long as she wants me to help her I shall, an' guard her from such as you. The Lord's given me this gift, an' it's the first mite o' comfort I've had since Myron was run over by that truck. I've stopped you because I have a message for you. 'Tell Roddy to give up Lushy,' your mother says. 'She has another mate on the sperrit plane. She's not for you. You're sunk in darkness. . . .'"

As she spoke the look of malignity faded, and its place was taken by the look of fierce rapture Dirk had noticed when he first entered Lucia's sitting-room. He began to be almost convinced that the old woman, with her strength and force of passion, and her violent personality, believed in herself and her powers as sincerely as Lucia did. She *had* power of some sort. She moved him while she spoke.

He answered her briefly and moved on, raging inwardly. The old woman, it was clear, had developed a fierce devotion to Lucia; a devotion that was so jealous as to wish to exclude every one else.

"Her subconscious self apparently does more of the messages than Lucia's does," was his comment to his

sister when he told her of his encounter. "I'm afraid she's getting a terrible influence over Lucia."

"It isn't her subconscious self. She's a deliberately bad woman, inventing all this for the sake of a hold on Lucia. But I admit I am beginning to understand why men felt like burning witches. . . ."

"My poor boy!" said Esther tenderly. "Isn't there *any* way of rescuing Lucia?"

"You've tried to see her. I've tried. That poor little fluttering soul of an aunt's tried. She's in a sort of infernal Paradise. . . . Oh, Esther, that horrible woman is gripping her soul!"

"It will pass," said Esther in her loving voice. She was by no means sure that it would, but her brother's happiness was the dearest thing on earth to her, and she would have said or done anything to insure it.

That Sunday Dirk Conkling preached on the wave of spiritism that was sweeping the country. He used all his powers, all his charm, all his force to drive home to his people the belief he held—that the thing was all a lie. He had never preached so well. Small wonder—the thing he preached against was stripping him of his happiness, and, he and Esther both feared, threatening the woman he loved with the loss of her mind. His people, whether they listened approvingly or disagreeing with him, knowing the tragedy that lay back of his sermon, listened tensely, and with little murmurs of sympathy. They were a well-bred folk for the most; there were not many glances cast over to where Lucia sat in her soft black draperies, with the look of

tremulous rapture on her soft childish face. She had her aunt on one side of her, slimly elegant in her expensive, perfumed satins. On the other side old Jen Gracey's slovenly black Henrietta and shabby old brown coat brushed her close. At one point in the sermon the old woman leaned forward, her lips open; she seemed on the point of getting up and making a scene. Lucia laid a light hand over hers and she sank back again. There was a sort of hushed breath that went through the congregation. They knew that Dirk Conkling was giving up his last chance of marrying Lucia Morgan by this stand of his for conscience' sake.

After the service was over Dirk went, according to the custom still kept up in his church, to stand by the door and speak to his people as they went out. Lucia hurried down the aisle, Mrs. Gracey's hand on her arm, casting a wistful glance back at him. She was gone before he could reach her. He felt as if this was all a dream, for the moment; one of those terrible dreams where you reach for the beloved and he or she is always just gone—just unattainable. If he could have reached her it seemed to him as if he could have changed her back to the girl she used to be, before this spell was on her. But she was gone; her car was flying down the street with her and Mrs. Gracey in it. He stared after it, forgetting where he was. His people passed him mutely. They were thrilled by the drama of it, but they loved him, too, and even those who did not believe as he believed, those who were, as they believed, reaching their dead through Lucia's road,

grieved with him, and seeing that silence was best gave it to him as their offering of affection.

As he stood straining his eyes after the little car, he felt a hand on his arm. He turned and saw that it was Mrs. Barry, whom he had forgotten. In the presence of old Mrs. Gracey's strength of personality one did forget Mrs. Barry. He looked at her in surprise; he had supposed that she would have gone back with her niece. She drew him farther within the empty church vestibule. Her face was drawn with anxiety.

"You're the only person I knew to come to," she said. "I'm nearly frantic. I can't stay in Lucia's house any longer, the way Mrs. Gracey treats me; she's a horribly rude old creature. And poor Lucia says, 'But Auntie, what can I do? She's the only person who can help me work the board!' She's begged me not to go, and she tries to keep old Mrs. Gracey in bounds; but I simply can't stand the woman. It's more than I can do, even for Lucia. And I can't make the board go, not the least bit in the world. The ghosts won't come if I'm even in the room. Oh, I forgot—they say I shouldn't call them ghosts. . . . It's breaking me down—it's killing me! And poor Lucy's child—though I'm getting almost so I have a feeling against Lucy, all the things she says to Lucia through the board. . . ."

He looked at her with haggard, weary eyes. "How do you suppose I feel about it, Mrs. Barry?" he said. "There is nothing I can do, except lie to Lucia; and I've put myself beyond the reach of that temptation—for it was a temptation—deliberately, to-day."

"You're like me. I've done everything I can," she said flutteringly, and went on. The words, though she did not mean them to, stung. He did not like to think of himself as being as helpless as poor Mrs. Barry; and yet he was, as far as he could be.

She came back irresolutely, as if she still hoped for something.

"Can't you do something?" she asked again. "Oh, I don't know what—something! If I were a man I'd do something! Come and see her again, anyway. I do think if your religion is worth anything, it ought to be able to make Lucia's ghosts stop. . . . She doesn't eat. . . . Oh, I'm nearly wild about it!"

Esther, standing by, shivered a little. She found that she secretly dreaded going back to the place where that strange message had come from nowhere.

When Mrs. Barry, brightened by the hope Dirk held out to her, had gone her fluttering way, he turned to his sister.

"She's right, Ess. I've been a coward. . . . Will you go there to-night with me—after service?"

She nodded.

"But how will you get in? Mrs. Barry, I suppose, is going back to her own house. And you know, Dirk, Lucia's servants—"

"I know. She won't let me in. But I will get in, somehow."

"They let Uncle Andrew Blanton in," said Esther consideringly. "If you went with him—"

"Yes. And somehow the thought of Uncle Andrew

is a comfort, rambling as he is." He smiled, drawn though his face was with distress. "I remember once when I borrowed a jackknife and lost it, I went to him —I was ten, I think—in great distress; and he told me what to do about it. The queer thing is that I don't remember anything about his advice, except that it was an excellent way through the trouble."

"If this were only a lost knife!" said his sister. "But at any rate, surely he will let you in."

"It will be a comfort to have some one to go to about it," said Dirk wearily. "One gets so tired, sometimes, of being grown and responsible. I think I should like, to-night, that feeling of being a small boy again that your elders give you sometimes."

Dr. Blanton had not returned when they arrived at his little book-cluttered rectory in the next town. They waited a little while on the dark, quiet porch, before he drove up, hung old Horatius' reins around the hitching post, and stepped stiffly down from his buggy, a little black box in his hand. He had evidently been somewhere giving communion to a sick person. He was old, and Sunday is a hard day for an old clergyman; but when they told him what they wanted he only stopped to put the little communion set away, and the black felt bag which he carried everything in, from books to vestments, and got in with them, Esther between the two men on the wide seat.

"How did you come to think of asking the old man to let you in, Dirk?" asked Uncle Andrew casually.

"I had to get in," said Dirk. "I think it was some-

thing Mrs. Barry said. I keep hearing her say it. She said, 'If your religion is worth anything, it ought to be able to make Lucia's ghosts stop.' But oh, Uncle Andrew,—isn't there anything to do?"

Uncle Andrew's voice changed for a moment from its easy, rambling tone, to the one he sometimes used when he preached.

"Dirk Conkling," he said, "you're a minister of the gospel. And if you can't think of anything that your religion can do to help you in a crisis, I can only advise you to pray till you find out that it can."

Dirk was silent under the rebuke. Esther found his hand in the soft darkness and held it tight. After a little while, he answered Dr. Blanton.

"You are right," he said slowly.

Uncle Andrew slipped back into being his old discursive self after that; even when the two young people followed him up the porch of Lucia's house, he made some little joke about housebreaking. Esther almost wished she had not suggested asking his help. After all, older people had such a gulf fixed between them and you. He did not realize, evidently, the thing's tragic seriousness. . . . And yet he had been visiting Lucia; he must have seen her fading away under the terrible stress of old Jen Gracey's practices. To still have access to the house he must even have admitted something of the reality of it all.

They stood back in the shadows as the maid opened the door for Dr. Blanton; and followed him in, in face of her look of astonished distress.

But Dr. Blanton spoke to her in a whisper. "You won't get into trouble for this, Milly."

Milly stepped aside and let them go up unannounced. Before they turned to climb the stair old Uncle Andrew put his hand on Dirk's shoulder as if he were an old soldier exhorting a young one before battle.

"Roderick," the old man said in a voice that, though nearly a whisper, was still as imperative as a shout, "have you been thinking over what Mrs. Barry said, and praying?"

Roderick faced him, his eyes on his.

"Yes," he said simply, and no more. But his face was the face of a man going into battle for the thing he holds most dear.

They gained Lucia's room, stepping quietly. All was as it had been last time; the gracious order, the numbers of books, all on the one topic nearest Lucia's heart, and the seated, tensely-still figures of Lucia and old Jen Gracey with the board between them, beside the window.

"They're comin' good to-night," Jen Gracey was saying exultantly as they stood unseen in the shadow outside the door. "You're gettin' to have an awful lot of Light, Lushy, almost as much as I have. I wish you et more, though." She glanced up at Lucia, more tenuous and transparent than ever, with an expression of uneasy affection. "I dunno's so much writin's good fer you. I'm tougher—it don't hurt me. S'pose we stop at twelve to-night?"

Lucia laughed a little excited trill of laughter.

"No! No indeed!" she said. "If They thought it was bad for me They wouldn't come—you know that. . . . And I do want to ask mother if she thinks Dirk mightn't be convinced. . . . The only time I'm unhappy is when I think about Dirk. You don't think ever—if I prayed for him, and They prayed for him—"

"Don't you think about Dirk Conkling," Jen broke in jealously. "You know what *Nonie's* always telling you. You have another mate on the sperrit plane."

A little spark of opposition lit in Lucia's wide eyes.

"It might have been a spirit pretending to be *Nonie,*" she objected. "You know some of the books say—"

"It wasn't. It was *Nonie,*" Mrs. Gracey affirmed; and then Lucia gave a little cry because the traveler was beginning to move under their hands.

They were spelling it out absorbedly when Dirk walked straight across the room, and kneeled down by Lucia, putting his arms around her.

"Lucia," he said. "I've come to ask you once more if you won't give up this thing and marry me."

She rested a moment in his arms as if they were a haven she had longed for; then she drew herself away.

"I can't give it up, Dirk," she said wistfully. "It's my religion; and you think it's a lie."

Dr. Blanton came out of the shadows and spoke suddenly—to Dirk, not to Lucia.

"Roderick," he said, and the easy whimsicality was all out of his voice, "I say to you again what Mrs. Barry said to you. If your religion is worth anything to you it can help you in this crisis. If you believe in

a living God, He can help you against the powers and principalities of darkness—which are not put to flight by denying that they exist."

He went out of the room.

Esther, watching, was reminded of the bespelled girls of old ballads, whose lovers had to fight for them against evil elfin things. She wondered suddenly if there had ever been reality in the old tales—reality of this sort. Lucia's slender body struggled in Dirk's strong arms like a wild thing. Suddenly Dirk spoke.

"Lucia, be still and listen to me. I do not believe any of this is a lie any longer. What he said is true. There is a living God and He will help me. There is a reality which holds you, an evil reality. Whether it is a force concentrated around that old woman, or something speaking through her from outside, I do not know. But it wants you for its selfish, cruel purposes. Your own mother would never wear your body out, as this thing is wearing it out."

The old woman darted at him, her gnarled, strong old hands pulling at his arms with a man's strength.

"You're blasphemin'. Don't listen to him, Lushy!" she screamed. "It's your mother! It's my son, Myron! He's your mate on the sperrit plane—he's told me so on the board twice lately. He'll tell you so to-night if you let him!—Lushy!"

Dirk's arms held about Lucia like iron, and the old woman, shaking with anger, set herself desperately to the board again, putting her hands on the traveler. Lucia, from Dirk's embrace, stretched out her own

hands mechanically and laid them on it too, and Dirk did not stop her.

The board was moving again. Esther watched it, sick at heart. Dirk did not move from his kneeling position, with his arms around Lucia. His sister could see his face, tense and resolved. She could see, too, the pointer, spelling out letter by letter, flying back and forth like a shuttle. Mechanically she watched it.

"W-e-d-o-n-t-w-a-n-t-h-i-m," it spelt. "I-n-f-l-u-e-n-c-e-u-n-f-a-v-o-r-a-b-l-e-."

So far she had watched it when suddenly she took her eyes from it, and fastened them on Dirk. He had begun to pray aloud, clutching Lucia closely. He did not move a finger, yet his sister got a sense of intense force radiating from him—a fighting force as much as if he had been using physical strength. Lucia, her hands, beyond his embrace, still lying on the "traveler," lay back lax and white, neither with him nor against him. The "traveler" had stopped.

"God," he prayed, "Thou art good. This thing is evil. Stop it for me. Give me back my girl. These are the powers of evil. Thou art above them—Thou art stronger than they. God, help me!"

He did not pray aloud after that, but Esther could see his lips moving, and feel that he was praying with a prayer that was a warfare; the simple faith that had carried him through his year of physical warfare was bearing him now through what she could feel was a bigger fight—a fight of mind against mind, influence against influence. He was fighting the violent old

woman at the other side of the board for the possession of Lucia Morgan.

Suddenly the "traveler" began moving again, very faintly. Mrs. Gracey watched it, spelling aloud.

"Roddy," it began; and she uttered a shrill cry of exultation.

"Your own mother, witnessin' against you!" she said.

"—is right," it went on. *"You are not strong enough, Lucia."*

Esther looked at Roderick. He was as still as before; but the sweat was standing out on his forehead. He looked like a man lifting that last ounce he was capable of. Effort was written all over him.

"Give it up, marry Roddy."

"No, no! That's a deceivin' spirit! It ain't sayin' that!" shrieked old Jen Gracey, and Esther pounced on her.

"You are moving the thing yourself," she accused her.

"I ain't! I ain't!" she screamed, her face flooding with a dull scarlet of anger.

"Look, Lucia!" insisted Esther. "Look!"

Lucia and Roderick, but still moveless, turned their eyes on the board. The old woman was plainly pulling the "traveler" away from the direction it wished to go.

"It says 'Don't marry Roddy.' You missed the 'Don't'!" she cried, half beside herself. She had lost all self-control. She was a passionate old creature by nature. And Lucia could see, even Lucia, that she was

fighting the "traveler"—making it write by sheer force of her own hands. Lucia sat up, her face, too, flushing. She could feel the pull away from her.

"Mrs. Gracey!" she panted. *"Oh, Mrs. Gracey!"* There was tragic reproach in her tone.

The Gracey woman flung down the board and took one step to Lucia's side, trying frantically to pull Dirk away.

"Oh, darlin', oh, darlin', I didn't! I never did! It was the first time—I was so beside myself I didn't know what I was doin'—" she pleaded in what Esther could see was real anguish. "Oh, Lucia, ain't you goin' to believe me?"

But Lucia clung closer to Dirk.

"You deceived me—" she began to say, and fainted.

• • • • • • •

"Don't let me see her! Oh, don't!" Lucia prayed them, lying on her couch, still clinging to Dirk as if he was the only real thing left her in a shattered world.

"You shan't, dear," her aunt assured her. She looked at Dirk as if he only could keep her safe from the strong power of the old woman; who was downstairs now, praying and pleading with Esther to let her see Lucia for just one moment, just to give her one more chance to prove that she was honest.

"You shall never see her again, if I can prevent it," he said. Lucia leaned her fair childish head against

her lover's arm with a satisfied sigh, and then shuddered a little as Esther came into the room.

"It's only I," Esther said. She was very white. She beckoned Dirk over to her and spoke in a low voice. "Dirk, the poor old soul is nearly crazy. I do believe that it's the first time she has cheated. It was a battle, you know—your force against hers—and when you controlled Lucia so that the 'traveler' moved to speak as you would have had it speak, and Mrs. Gracey found that the spirits, as she believed, had suddenly turned to your side, she was desperate."

"It was not my force against her force. It was the force of God that I had summoned against the forces of evil," he said sternly. He, too, was pale.

His sister looked at him strangely.

"May I tell her that Lucia forgives her?"

"Tell her that Lucia forgives her. And that she is never to speak to her again."

He went back and took his sweetheart in his arms again, as if to hold her by bodily protection from the powers of evil that had so nearly swept her from him. As Esther went out she looked back—Dirk had suddenly risen. A little fire burned on the hearth.

"Put them in, Lucia," he was saying; and Lucia, smiling a little, with her eyes trustfully on her lover's, was laying the board and the little wooden heart on the flame.

Esther, going downstairs with the message, found old Jen Gracey standing at the door with Uncle Andrew. He was smiling a little, even, and the old

woman, still shaken, was staring at him as if she was hearing something wonderful and strange. It came to Esther that perhaps the old soul had not had much belief or consideration in her life. And perhaps this passion for lifting her son, who had been everything in the world to her, by her fantastic spirit-betrothal to Lucia, was forgivable after all . . . and yet even Esther could not but feel that there had been more in the room than themselves. Had it been merely clash of personality against personality, or . . . what? She shivered as she came to them.

"Yes, I'll come see you to-morrow night," Jen said in a strangely gentle voice. "I—I didn't go to hurt her."

"I know you didn't. You loved her," said Uncle Andrew. "But you might have been letting loose things on her that you couldn't stop, you know. We'll talk about it to-morrow."

She pulled her shawl close and went out, before Lucia could deliver the message from Dirk.

Uncle Andrew smiled at her.

"Things straightened out?" he said. "Well, suppose you and I wend our homeward way, like the plowman of whom so little is heard nowadays. They won't want us for some little space of time."

They went out to the old buggy and its patient horse, and drove homeward. When you were out with Uncle Andrew you could always be sure of hearing a great many quotations. To-night he finished most of Gray's Elegy before they reached Dirk's house.

But just before Esther got out, Uncle Andrew said musingly:

"God is our refuge and our strength—an ever present help in time of trouble. Queer most people don't do anything about that. You know, Essie, it's really so. . . . Think they'll let me marry them?"

THE END

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